

The UNITY Mission Model for Positive School Climate

A Project of the



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Executive Summary

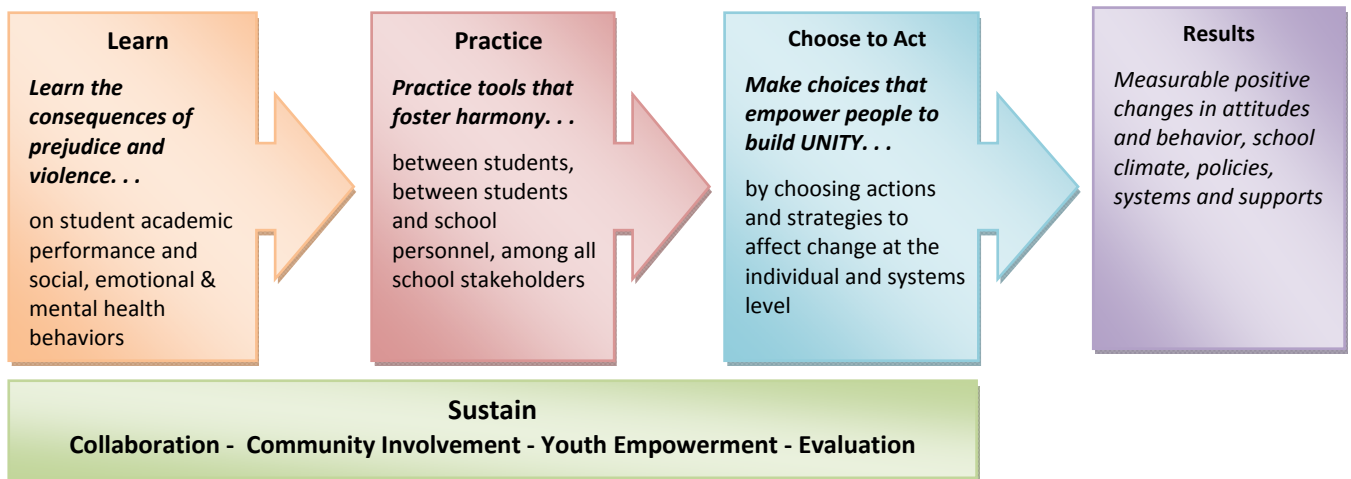
The Problem: School Climate and Bullying

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that, 30% of sixth to tenth graders in the United States were either a bully, a target of bullying, or both (CDC, 2009). In California, nearly 37% of middle and high school students were bullied or physically assaulted at school, and about 75% of these experiences were bias-related (Heck et al., 2005). Targeting youth is also an important step to preventing biased behavior and attitudes from escalating to hate crimes. National FBI statistics reveal that 31% percent of violent hate crime offenders and 46% of property offenders were under age 18 (NCJRS, 2009).

The Solution: The UNITY Mission Model

The Institute for Advancing Unity is an education organization whose mission is to create transformational experiences where people learn about the consequences of prejudice and violence, practice tools that foster harmony, and make choices that empower themselves and others to build unity. The UNITY tenets provide the foundation for creating a school climate where bullying is unacceptable, understanding and inclusiveness are cultural norms, and students feel empowered to be champions of these norms.

We have created a pedagogical model for positive change in school climate based on the steps embodied by our mission. This process, employed sequentially and adapted to each community, results in a positive environmental change for the entire school. This change is sustained by a curriculum for ongoing activities that promote unity.



The Results: Petaluma, CA Case Study

In 2008 the Institute for Advancing Unity partnered with The Healthy Community Consortium (HC²) in Petaluma, California to create and help implement a Unity Mission Model for three school campuses. More than 900 students and 300 adult volunteers have participated in the initiative and the preliminary results at each school are significant.

- Student expulsions and disciplinary actions are down by over 65%.
- Harassment and bullying are down 47%, with sexual harassment down 28%.
- Violent crimes are down as much as 100%.
- Repeat truancy and tardiness reports are down, with excessive tardiness down 47%.
- Staff time spent on disciplinary action is significantly reduced.
- Student suspensions related to violence and harassment are down 68% despite the loss of the School Resource Officer in January of 2009.
- Teachers are referring students to assistance programs for counseling support, additional academic support, tutoring and mentoring.
- The climate of conflict has become a climate of unity.

Organizational History: The Institute for Advancing Unity

The Capital Unity Council (Council) was established ten years ago after thousands of Sacramento citizens gathered to peacefully protest a rash of hate crimes. Recognizing that the fear of difference fueling the need for the Institute was not limited to Sacramento, visionary leaders such as Senate President pro Tem Darrell Steinberg launched a project to establish an education center for peace that would serve the nation, called the UNITY Lab. In June 2010, the Council crystallized its state and national focus and became called the Institute for Advancing Unity.

The Institute for Advancing Unity is an education organization whose mission is to create transformational experiences where people learn about the consequences of prejudice and violence, practice tools that foster harmony, and make choices that empower themselves and others to build unity. Its shovel-ready education facility, the UNITY Lab, will be located one block from State Capitol grounds. The UNITY Lab will be a state institution and a national hub for violence prevention and community-building research and resources. This experiential media and technology-driven learning center will also be a gathering place where community groups collaborate to solve problems and celebrate together.

The Institute for Advancing Unity's curriculum combines proven best practices with transformative media and technology to implement our mission. We empower schools and communities with these innovative tools for ongoing activities that promote our tenets of UNITY:

Understand one another's perspectives

Nonviolent tools to affect social, individual and community change

Include everyone in the process

Teach others how to be champions of UNITY

You can make a difference

The Problem: Why Focus on School Climate to Promote UNITY?

While we raise support to construct the UNITY Lab building (by 2013) and grow our national partnerships, our primary focus is school climate, where the need and potential impact of our outreach efforts is greatest. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 30% of sixth to tenth graders in the United States were either a bully, a target of bullying, or both (CDC, 2009). In California, nearly 37% of middle and high school students were bullied or physically assaulted at school, and about 75% of these experiences were bias-related (Heck et al., 2005). Targeting youth is also an important step to preventing biased behavior and attitudes from escalating to hate crimes. National FBI statistics reveal that 31% percent of violent hate crime offenders and 46% of property offenders were under age 18 (NCJRS, 2009).

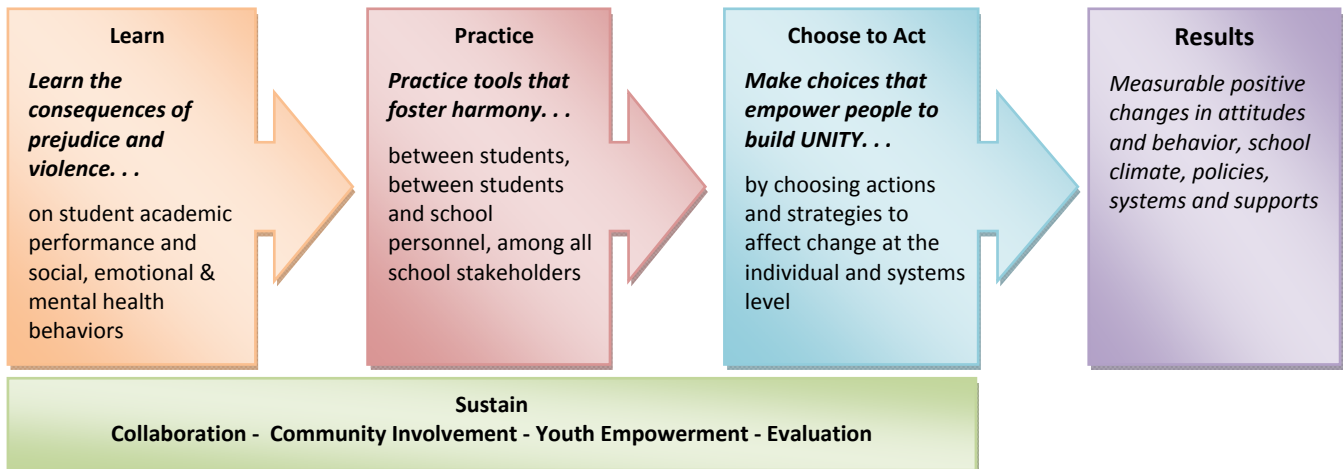
The UNITY tenets provide the foundation for creating a school climate where

- bullying is unacceptable,
- understanding and inclusiveness are cultural norms, and
- students feel empowered to be champions of these norms.

Over the last three years, we have successfully adapted and helped to implement sustainable, community-supported program models on school campuses. The lion's share of our school-based initiatives have served elementary, middle, and high schools in California, including Sacramento, Elk Grove, Galt, Petaluma, Riverside, and, most recently, Los Angeles. Working closely with school districts, we target schools that have diverse populations; that have experienced increased incidences of violence, bullying or disciplinary events; or that are experiencing conflict between students of different ethnicities, sexual orientations, abilities or religions--categories that relate to the highest levels of bias-related harassment on school campuses.

The Model: The UNITY Mission Model

We have created a pedagogical model for positive change in school climate based on the steps embodied by our mission. The UNITY Mission Model contains three interrelated steps that lead to measurable results. This process, employed sequentially and adapted to each community, results in a positive environmental change for the entire school. This change is sustained by a curriculum for ongoing activities that promote unity.



Learn. This catalyst stage provides students an opportunity to explore the consequences of bullying and other forms of violence and prejudice in a safe, supportive environment. At this stage, opportunities to listen, share, reflect are created so that students, teachers, and other school stakeholders understand the social and emotional barriers to success. This step also provides an opportunity to identify assets in the school and community environment that empower students to overcome these barriers. Giving examples of real-life situations in which prevention and intervention were used aims to create an opening for participants to begin to change their own attitudes and behavior.

Practice. Learning is actualized by practicing skills that build and strengthen participants' capacity to prevent negative incidences and behaviors, intervene and change the outcome of potentially negative encounters, and begin to establish cultural and policy norms that embrace UNITY. This is achieved through workshops, trainings, classroom curriculum, and other experiential activities. Capacity and skill building are also critical for adult stakeholders, including teachers, parents, administrators, and community members, so that they can provide ongoing reinforcement, support, and mentoring to students. Consistent with the practice step, these activities are considered "application" experiences, an important element that demonstrates new learned behaviors.

Choose to Act. In this stage, participants, especially students, are empowered to create and implement activities, strategies, and solutions to school climate issues that impede student success. Empowerment and choice create buy-in and ownership, vital components of the approach. Possible activities could include service learning, curriculum adoption, policy advocacy projects, and policy changes.

Sustain. Individual change does not automatically lead to community change. For the UNITY Mission Model to translate to community-level change, youth who have been trained in the first three steps must be supported by collaborative family and community involvement. The Institute for Advancing Unity's initiatives aim for systems-level changes that promote sustainability. An evaluation system providing ongoing feedback to all stakeholders is a foundational component of sustainability.

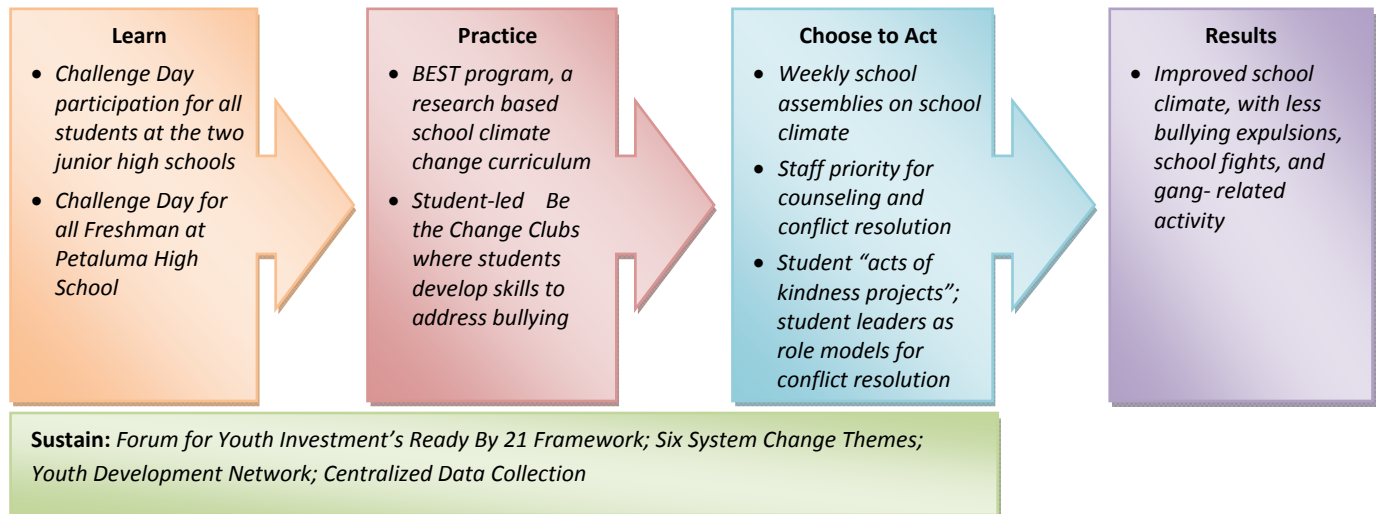
Results. Realizing *measurable* results is a vital outcome of implementing the UNITY Mission Model. Preliminary results of a case study in Petaluma, California are promising. Despite barriers to change, such as skepticism from administrators and teachers, challenges to collaboration, the impact on students at-large, and especially on at-risk students, has been remarkable. Schools have reported dramatic decreases in school violence, gang related activity, harassment, and bullying. The integrated and sustained implementation of the UNITY Mission Model has yielded multi-year changes in school climate, where students, teachers, and administrators are actively aware of the social environment and working to improve relationships each and every day. In addition, stakeholders have realized the value of data collection and improved collection methods to better assess results.

Case Study: Petaluma, CA Youth Network Ready by 21 Initiative

Summary: In 2008 the Institute for Advancing Unity (formerly the Capital Unity Council) partnered with The Healthy Community Consortium (HC²) in Petaluma, California to help implement the Forum for Youth Investment's Ready by 21 Initiative. Ready by 21 is designed to create a framework for communities to work together to ensure that all children have what they need to succeed by age 21. More than 900 students and 300 adult volunteers have participated in the initiative at three school campuses: Petaluma High School, Petaluma Junior High School, and Kenilworth Junior High School. The Institute's role was to work with HC² to integrate a method for addressing students' social and emotional health needs as a foundational component of the overall plan to develop students' academic and career readiness.

The Petaluma UNITY Mission Model

The Institute for Advancing Unity and the Healthy Community Consortium worked together to develop an implementation strategy, based on the UNITY Mission Model, that would address school climate and social and emotional needs of at-risk students at three Petaluma schools. The approach was presented to school administrators, parents, and students and was incorporated into the Ready by 21 framework that was being used to guide the development of the overall initiative. Application of the model entailed implementing best practices programs that enable students, school stakeholders and community members to realize the UNITY Mission Model process.



While all school sites chose the Challenge Day program in the learn phase, Petaluma High and Kenilworth Junior High Schools implemented Be the Change Clubs at the practice stage. Petaluma Junior High School chose to continue implementation of the school climate program, Building Effective Schools Together (BEST). Programs incorporated into the model were chosen in response to each schools' needs and reflected the increasing empowerment of students, school stakeholders, and community members to take the initiative to implement projects and activities to address school climate.

Full details on the model implemented at each school, as well as the findings of each school, can be found in "Findings: Case Study Results", Pages 6-8.

Extended Outcomes in Petaluma

The Healthy Community Consortium implemented a community-level change process to sustain and expand the positive results of the UNITY Mission Model and to continue to fully integrate the process into the Forum for Youth Investment's Ready By 21 framework. The approaches are synergistic in that they both encourage members of the broader community to practice tools, make commitments and choose to act in ways that build unity in homes, neighborhoods, schools, community-based organizations and businesses. Implementing these processes has included the development of "Themes of Change," a program with activities designed to increase parent participation, increase youth leadership, and facilitate career training for Petaluma students.

Findings: Case Study Results

Petaluma Junior High: Participant since Fall 2008

Learn. At Petaluma Junior High, 95% of the student population and 90% of the staff have participated in a Challenge Day program, the catalyst event chosen by school administrators.

Practice. After the Challenge Day experience, administrators implemented the BEST program, a research-based school climate change curriculum.

Choose to Act. As a component of the BEST program, the Principal facilitates a theme-based weekly assembly attended by all students and staff. Possible themes include respect for self and others, safety, responsibility, pro-active problem solving, no teasing, etc. The Principal acknowledges students who have demonstrated the behaviors related to the theme and staff includes these themes in their classroom teaching.

Results. The results of combining the one-day impact of Challenge Day with a systematic school-wide climate change curriculum that teaches and fosters tools of harmony exceeded all staff expectations.

- **Student expulsions and disciplinary actions are down by over 65%.** Student tardiness, gang related-incidents and social tension between cliques and cultural groups is reduced. Before the implementation of the UNITY Mission Model, fights and incidents of teasing and bullying resulted in daily student referrals to administrative offices. In the 2009/10 academic year, student conflict is managed almost entirely at the scene of the situation, whether it is in the classroom, lunch room or on the school yard, because students, teachers and all school staff are trained in the language and practices of mutual respect, care, self-responsibility, safety, and honesty.
- **Staff time spent on disciplinary action is significantly reduced.** Assistant Principal Emily Dunnigan reports that she has seen a 50% reduction in the amount of time she spends addressing negative student behavior. This has enabled students, families and staff to focus on student learning.
- **The climate of conflict has become a climate of unity.** Students make appointments to speak with school staff about an area of difficulty they are having either alone or together. When conflicts do happen, they are resolved quickly with full student participation and understanding.

“Before I went to Challenge Day, there were some kids I did not like because they looked different than me and I would tease them or pick on them because they were different. I did not know who they were. I found out so much about them at Challenge Day. They have done so many cool things and lived all over the place. I did not use to think it hurt them to tease them or make fun of them. I just didn’t know that. Now I realize that kids get hurt by stuff I say and I don’t want to do that anymore. I have more friends since Challenge Day. I don’t want anyone to be hurt. I like the weekly assemblies we have with Mr. Lehman and the daily announcements to remind me of ways I can do it.” - Student at Petaluma Junior High School

Findings: Case Study Results

Kenilworth Junior High: Participant since Fall 2009

There was strong opposition from teachers and staff to implementing the Petaluma UNITY Mission Model at Kenilworth Junior High School. A significant group of staff members questioned the value of using school resources, facilities and classroom time for what they perceived to be “optional” programs. As a result, the Challenge Day activities were spearheaded by the local Boys and Girls Club, staffed by volunteer staff, family members, and school faculty. **This response underscores the importance of community involvement to the sustainability of the effort, and is a key element of the UNITY Mission Model.**

Learn. The Challenge Day program at the Boys and Girls Club involved 100 students and 30 adults.

Practice. Kenilworth established a Be the Change Club with weekly meetings throughout the school year. The club has created school televised public service announcements for Challenge Day and carried the challenges such as “Reach out and invite someone you don’t know to eat with you” into the lunch room and onto the school yard. They handed out “Please don’t tease!” buttons.

Choose to Act. School administrators and staff implemented a life skills curriculum that included Mustang Awards – incentive cards for demonstrating the behaviors of respect, responsibility, care, safety, nonviolence and cooperation.

Results. Kenilworth began implementing the UNITY Mission Model in fall 2009. After less than one year of the program, administrators have seen dramatic results:

- **Violent crimes are down as much as 100%.**

Incident	Fighting	Battery	Injury to another	Gang-related incidents	Theft
Percentage drop	77%	100%	62%	70%	85%

- **Harassment and bullying are down 47%, with sexual harassment down 28%.**
- **Repeat truancy and tardiness reports are down, with excessive tardiness down 47%.**
- **Teachers are referring students to assistance programs for counseling support, additional academic support, tutoring and mentoring.**

“I was skeptical about whether this program would have any effect on our school, particularly with the persistently difficult students who are referred to my office many times a week for disruptive behavior and who are consistently truant or tardy for class. I was amazed by the program itself when I attended my first Challenge Day. It was a very pleasant surprise to discover that the kids that used to occupy 15 or more hours of my week in disciplinary action are not coming into my office at all unless they are popping their head in to say “Hi!” And these same kids, who had difficult families, have had family members call us to thank us for Challenge Day because their child was very positively changed both at school and home by the program” -- Assistant Principal, Will Deeths

Findings: Case Study Results

Petaluma High School:

First Challenge Day in 2007/08 academic year, full curriculum participant since Fall 2008

Learn. Petaluma High has been using the UNITY Mission Model for two academic years, shifting their methodology to fit a large urban campus (1,486 students). All incoming freshmen participate in a Challenge Day program, with additional active students from the sophomore through senior classes.

Practice. Determining that the school size and structure made a school-wide campaign like BEST difficult, Petaluma High instituted the Be the Change Club. The club meets weekly and is attended by between 15 and 25 students.

Choose to Act. The club sends weekly messages out on the school announcement board and stages lunch-time events promoting safety, respect, responsibility, equity and nonviolence. This year, students have begun to form the Youth Action Council, a body aimed at identifying how they can affect school policy and encourage systems-level changes that would provide greater support for students.

Results.

- **Student suspensions related to violence and harassment are down 68% despite the loss of the School Resource Officer in January of 2009.** Prior to the first Challenge Day, student suspensions had been at approximately the same rate for nearly four consecutive years, at 227 each academic year. Since the inception of the UNITY Mission Model, suspensions have plummeted from 227 to 75 in less than three years.
 - *07-08 suspensions went down by 15% after one Challenge Day*
 - *08-09 suspensions went down 30% to 161 from baseline*
 - *In 09-10 suspensions are down to 75, a 68% reduction since the inception of the program.*

“Since attending Challenge Day, I feel more welcomed. What I really liked about Challenge Day is to see how many people apologized to me personally for making fun of classical music. After participating in Challenge Day, I feel more welcomed at school and more respected.”

–Petaluma High School Student

“I feel like every person on the planet should attend Challenge Day – it makes you more aware of the way you treat people, and more aware of how you treat yourself.”

–Petaluma High School Student

Conclusion: The Success of the UNITY Mission Model

Now in its second academic year, the Petaluma UNITY Mission Model has produced significant changes in behavior at the three participating schools and the UNITY Mission Model has realized several outcomes that demonstrate its potential as a national model:

- **Replicability and Adaptability** – The UNITY Mission Model is a process that can be integrated into systems-change frameworks. In the Petaluma case, the UNITY Mission Model was integrated into the community's initiative and the Forum for Youth Investment's Ready by 21 framework. The results were a dramatic reduction in school climate factors that have been proven to impede student academic success.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration** – Collaboration in the UNITY Mission Model is a sustainability factor, and the Petaluma case is indicative of its relevance. The Healthy Community Consortium has established partnerships with many organizations to serve the community. The Consortium and its partners achieved results by integrating a new process rather than simply adding new programs.
- **Role of The Institute for Advancing Unity as Facilitator** – The Institute for Advancing Unity has been a powerful strategic partner with The Healthy Community Consortium by providing vision, financial support and connection to the bigger picture of youth success across the country.

Next Steps: Expanding the UNITY Mission Model

The Institute for Advancing Unity is working to expand on the success obtaining in Petaluma by initiating more model programs and creating strong tools for educators and administrators. Below is a sampling of what the Institute for Advancing Unity is currently working on for the coming year.

- *Lessons Learned Document*: At the close of the school year, The Institute for Advancing Unity and Petaluma Healthy Community Consortium will co-author a Lessons Learned document that will highlight the knowledge and strategies gained during the implementation of the UNITY Mission Model at the Petaluma schools. The document will also highlight further results and profiles of participants. The document will be produced digitally and be accessible from The Institute for Advancing Unity website at: www.championsofunity.org.
- *Integration of the Institute for Advancing Unity Educational Tools and Resources*: This summer, The Institute for Advancing Unity will complete *Express Yourself*, an interactive tool that inspires students to prevent violence by practicing the nonviolent tool of creative expression. The Center is currently working with the Petaluma Healthy Community Consortium and the Sacramento City Unified School District to incorporate into the UNITY Mission Model activities into the *Express Yourself Forum*, a one-day unity building event that will bring student and adult participants together to develop inter-campus mentoring relationships and create service-learning projects that focus on school climate.
- *The ULAB for Teens website*. The site adapts extraOrdinary people vignettes to a youth-friendly platform and features a unique game, extraOrdinary You! The site and game completed and can be viewed at www.teens.championsofunity.org.
- *Expansion and Further Research of the UNITY Mission Model*: Plans are under development to implement and evaluate the UNITY Mission Model through a place-based approach in the Sacramento City Unified School District in the 2010-2011 school year. Focusing on three schools in one neighborhood, an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school, where each level feeds students into the next, offers a unique opportunity to empower young people, along with school and community members, to change an alarming trend of violence and disciplinary problems occurring in all three schools. Since these schools feed one another, the potential for siblings to participate in programs and activities with shared expectations and cultural norms is great, which also increases the potential for parent and community participation, vital components of systemic change. A publicly-accessible lessons learned report will be produced at the end of the school year.