

How To Make Communities Safer

The second focus for NEA affiliates that want to create safer schools involves working with the community. To do so effectively, it will be helpful for affiliates to address several issues, including identifying community groups with which to work, helping to form a community safety board, and giving the community control over the board. This section outlines four steps for accomplishing these objectives.

Steps for Making Communities Safer

1. Involve key community leaders
 2. Form a community safety board
 3. Conduct a community survey
 4. Take stock and evaluate
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Step 1: Involve Key Community Leaders

The participation of community leaders is crucial to any plan that would make schools safer. In soliciting their involvement, make sure that key community leaders are identified and recruited and that they represent the public and private sectors. After the entire group is in place, involve those leaders in a one-day seminar. At the seminar, try to—

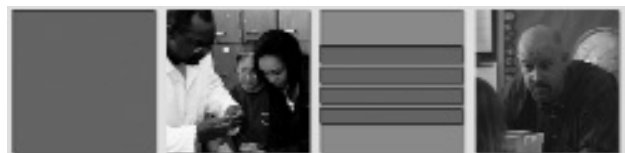
1. Formulate a vision around common goals and objectives.
2. Decide whether or not to conduct a community assessment study. (If you decide to conduct such a study, proceed to design one.)
3. Determine who else should serve on the community safety board.
4. Formulate a method for selecting community (non-educator) leadership of the board.

Step 2: Form a Community Safety Board

Forming the community safety board is an important step because it sets the foundation for community ownership of the program. As was mentioned earlier, school violence and crime do not have their origins in schools but in communities and families, and members of the board who represent those two sectors can offer insights on possible solutions.

NEA offers the following guidelines for forming the community board:

- Invite community leaders in addition to the key leaders.
- Make sure that those leaders represent all segments of the community, such as representatives of protective services; parent groups; cultural groups, and media, as well as local clergy, businesspeople, and community activists
- Schedule a series of training events to address evaluation, funding, data collection and analysis, and program promotion
- Schedule regular meetings and develop a newsletter to keep community leaders informed and feeling good about themselves and their antiviolence achievements
- Elect a community leader to serve as chairperson of the board



Step 3: Conduct a Community Survey

A third step in working with the community is conducting a community survey. The survey should take stock of selected socio-demographic and crime and violence information.

- Conduct a community assessment that will help the community board to develop a clear, comprehensive portrait of the community. (For suggested issues, see “Risk Factors to Address in a Community Assessment Survey” on the next page)
- Gather information on programs and data that are already available in the community

Sources of Information to Describe the Problem

In gathering data about school safety and the surrounding community, the following sources may be helpful.

Health Outcome Information

Health department
 Medical examiner
 Hospital and emergency room
 Outpatient records
 Emergency medical service records
 School records

Information that Describes Causes of the Violent Event

School records: attendance, truancy, suspensions, racial tension
 Substance abuse clinics
 Police and legal systems
 Firearm sales

Opinion Information

Discussions with community leaders
 Discussions with police, legal and health personnel, and parents

Discussions with all types of youth in the community
 Opinion surveys of the general population
 Focus groups

Community Background Information

U.S. Bureau of the Census
 U.S. Department of Labor
 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
 U.S. and state departments of education
 Churches
 Community businesses

Step 4: Take Stock and Evaluate

At some point, the community safety board will need to take stock of its efforts to reduce violence in the community and schools. Specifically, the board will need to evaluate the programs it has implemented and, to do so, it will need to design an appropriate evaluation instrument. Training will need to be provided, unless a core group on the board has expertise in program evaluation.

In designing a training event, keep in mind the need to develop evaluation skills and an action plan focusing on the three essential sectors: community, family, and school. Make sure that participants in the training event learn how to—

- Relate school safety programs to the conditions and behaviors they are intended to change.
- Develop an action plan that contains steps for—
 - Identifying and prioritizing the most important risk factors within the community
 - Selecting strategies that have been tested and evaluated for their effectiveness

- Developing goals and objectives for an action plan that respond to the problems identified in the community needs assessment
 - Identifying obstacles to executing the plan and the resources for overcoming these obstacles
 - Establishing appropriate program evaluation strategies
- c. Focus on the community by acquiring information about—
- Ways to mobilize the community
- Policies aimed at behaviors and activities that harm the community and school
 - Ways to educate the media about how children are placed at risk and how children can be protected
- d. Focus on the family by acquiring information about prenatal and infant care, early childhood education, and parent training.
- e. Focus on the school by acquiring information about school development and management, instructional improvements, school architecture, and curriculum.

Risk Factors to Address in a Community Assessment Study

<u>Community Factors</u>	<u>Family Factors</u>	<u>Individual and Peer Factors</u>
Drug availability	Family history of high-risk behavior	Bullying
Community norms that allow drug use and crime	Family management problems	Alienation, rebelliousness, and lack of bonding with peers
Mobility (transients and people moving in or out)	Negative parental attitudes and limited involvement in children’s lives	Antisocial behavior in early adolescence
Community disorganization and low neighborhood attachment	Lack of family commitment to school	Friends who engage in problem behavior
Economic and social deprivation		Favorable attitudes toward the problem behavior
		Early initiation of the problem behavior

