

Devoted To:

- Improving academics
- Deterring violence
- Fostering resiliency
- Enhancing coping skills
- Reducing risk
- Preventing suicide

Boosting resiliency [protective factors in schools]

When it comes to resiliency, some students just seem to fare better than others. There are youngsters who bounce back readily from tough times. They appear hardy and quick to recover from adversity. These students are buoyant and self-reliant.

Then there are other students, those more prone to angst. They may be stressed easily and overwhelmed by circumstances that more resilient students often brush off. Poor academic outcomes for these stressed youngsters aren't the only obstacle they face.

These at-risk students can be prone to self-destructive behaviors and be vulnerable to negative things in their environment—bullying, cutting, binge drinking and drug use, promiscuity, and violence against others or suicide.

Protecting youngsters from suicide is not only about recognizing those at risk and intervening reactively to dissuade them from self-harm. Effective youth suicide prevention is much more comprehensive because it promotes positive behaviors that can reduce the likelihood that a vulnerable child will become suicidal.

Schools play a central role in fostering resiliency and protective factors, shown to be a key to student success—academic and beyond. As administrators, you can lay the foundation for a school culture where children feel a sense of belonging and connectedness. You can put practices in place that influence student behavior and boost outcomes. And you can encourage development of protective factors that indeed boost social and academic competence.



Success. Respect. Future. All tied to student academic achievement. And all impacted by school culture and its promotion of protective factors that can safeguard youths from risk-taking behaviors.

STRENGTHENING RESILIENCY IN YOUR STUDENTS

Feedback from a national expert in protective factors for suicide prevention



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As administrators, you know well that if students are stressed and not feeling safe, academics suffer. The good news? Noteworthy programs for suicide prevention in schools can help. Among these is the Lifelines™ program. A curriculum targeting students ages 12-17, Lifelines teaches warning signs for suicide, how to respond to a suicidal peer and help-seeking behaviors. A new CDC-funded study of Lifelines shows it increases teens' confidence in a school's ability to respond to at-risk kids. These findings are key, as enhancing students' trust in school staff may help break the culture of silence that isolates students at risk from adults who can help them. As a 30-year researcher and developer of curricula for at-risk students, I commend the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Mental Health Association of Wisconsin in collaborating on this *Well Aware* newsletter to support programs and policies so vital to children, their future and ours as well.

A bulletin for **WISCONSIN**
education leaders including:

- School Board Members
- Superintendents
- Principals
- Student Services Directors
- Central Office Administration
- Deans of Students

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

School leaders can do a lot to boost resiliency in their students. First step? Consider protective factors for youths that can boost social and academic success.

UNDERSTAND THE RISK

Research shows that, on average, 11 percent of students have difficulty learning due to mental disorders. Moreover, youngsters with emotional disturbances have high dropout rates. So, it's critical that school personnel become more astute at identifying these children early and connecting them with resources.

PUT PROTECTORS IN PLACE

Fostering social and personal resources in youngsters can enhance their resiliency and guard against their succumbing to negative behaviors. These protective factors include:

Social Resources:

- Strong interpersonal bonds
- Social support
- Sense of belonging
- Strong attitudes and values that guard against suicide

Personal Resources:

- Strong sense of self worth and self esteem
- Good cognitive skills
- Sense of personal control
- Self-management skills to deal with stress, anger and depression

INTERVENE PROACTIVELY

Schools can do much to enhance student resiliency and promote protective factors. See "Helping Hand" on page 2.

Teaching empathy early on [helping students reach their full potential]

Compassion and empathy for others, especially for those less fortunate, is a cornerstone of a caring community. That's why districts throughout Wisconsin have embraced anti-bullying policies, and why DPI has expanded its Bullying Prevention Curriculum with instructional units for grades 3-5 and 6-8. That gives Jackie Baldwin of St. Germain a great sense of satisfaction.

A mother of two sons, now grown yet both with emotional challenges from an early age, Jackie watched as her boys battled ridicule and were ostracized by their peers. When younger son Mike told her he didn't want to be alive anymore, Jackie felt compelled to act. Her tenacity and advocacy supported the school

district in its efforts to implement bullying prevention that is in compliance with Wis. statutes, the Civil Rights Act and Title IX—all mandating nondiscrimination policies that prohibit harassment and intimidation, including in schools.

Yet Jackie's efforts to be more proactive about bullying and discrimination in her community were not without setbacks.

"At first my son felt that adults were not taking his concerns seriously, nor were they intervening to bring consequences to perpetrators who were carrying out acts of bullying," notes Jackie. She adds that her son was already coping with a disability and ridicule. Jackie urges schools to consider their culture and

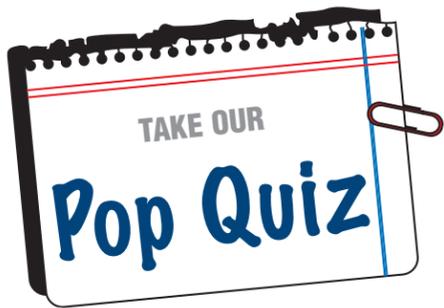
climate, and work toward a more supportive environment for all. This was key, she notes, to her son's achievements which included a prestigious President's Education Award for outstanding academic achievement, and scholarship from the Nicolet College Foundation.

"The question is, how to assist the child not as resilient as others, and help them reach their full potential," Jackie adds. The biggest thing she's learned from her work in advocacy to counter bullying? "Kids need to be taught early on how to be compassionate. That's the core of the matter."

Learn more: DPI Bullying Prevention Curriculum at www.dpi.wi.gov/pubsales/pplsvc_2.html.



A critical barrier to student success, bullying often starts in early school years. It can negatively impact a student's connection with school and their overall ability to learn. That's why bullying prevention is critical to a school environment conducive to learning and where students feel safe at all times. It's also consistent with the New Wisconsin Promise to ensure a quality education for every child.



[mood matters]

SCHOOL CLIMATE

How does yours stack up?

A positive school climate is a cornerstone of suicide prevention and integral to academic success.

How does your school stack up in providing a caring, supportive community for all?

1 YES OR NO?
Transitions
Do we have a well thought out set of activities to support transition between grades and schools? YES or NO?

2 TRUE OR FALSE?
Keeping bullying behavior under control
Student bullying is best resolved by addressing only those directly engaged in the behavior. If the other students aren't being bullied or bullying, it's not necessary to involve them.
TRUE or FALSE?

3 YES OR NO?
Evidence-based mental health knowledge
Does our mental health curriculum include factual information on mental illness that helps reduce stigma? YES or NO?

4 YES OR NO?
Student Assistance Program
My district has a SAP (student assistance program) offering a systematic way to address emotional, behavioral and performance issues with students. YES or NO?

5 YES OR NO?
Boosting social skills
Does our school offer problem solving, conflict resolution or coping skills training to at-risk youth? YES or NO?

ANSWERS

1. Yes. Transition programs, such as those that pair older students with younger students, build a positive climate and increase a sense of belonging for students. School connectedness has been shown to be protective with regard to suicide attempts.

2. False. Effectively addressing bullying means involving the entire school community and using school-wide interventions and classroom activities in addition to individual interventions.

3. Yes is the ideal. Integrating current and evidence-based information on mental illness into health curricula can reduce stigma.

4. Yes, having an SAP program in place is preferred. Because of the link between substance abuse and suicide, substance abuse prevention is suicide prevention.

5. Yes. These types of training can reduce suicide by helping youth identify a variety of healthy strategies to solve problems.

"It's about relationships before curriculum and test scores. Before anything, it's about connecting with youth. Kids don't care to know unless they know that you care. Do we recognize that what is at the core of our job is not just test scores? It's about learning, it's about human development. We truly can't lose sight of that."



Climate change isn't just a global environmental issue. It's something that school administrators should be well aware of to ensure youngsters have an optimal environment for education and success. That means creating policies that bond schools, staff and students together for the achievement of all.

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Sad statistic for our state [call to action]

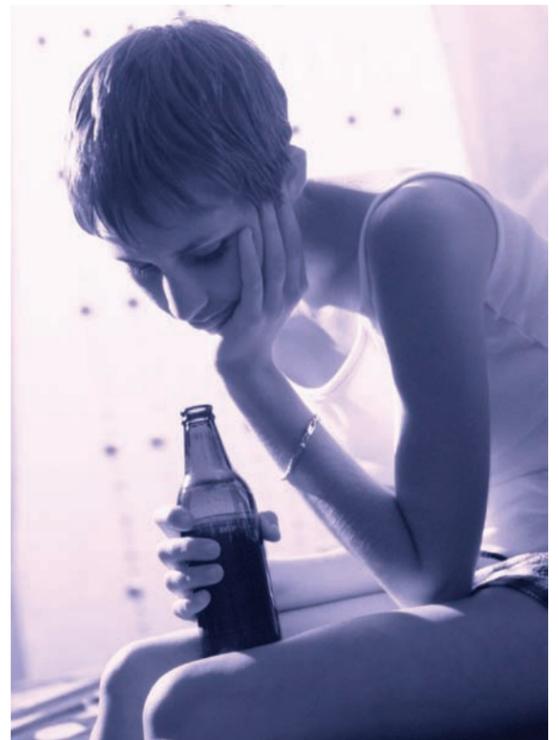
The word out of Washington, D.C., earlier this year was startling:

“No other state in the nation has a **HIGHER RATE OF UNDERAGE DRINKING** than Wisconsin.”

RISK FACTOR

Binge drinking is highly correlated with suicide attempts.

SOURCE: Eggert, Leona. 2002. Best Practices for School-Based Youth Suicide Prevention. WI DPI.
For more publications, visit www.dpi.wi.gov/pubsales/index.html



Wisconsin ranks first nationally in underage drinking between ages 12-20.

Well Aware

A Suicide Prevention Bulletin for **WISCONSIN School Administrators**

- School Board Members ■ Superintendents
- Principals ■ Student Services Directors
- Central Office Administration ■ Deans of Students

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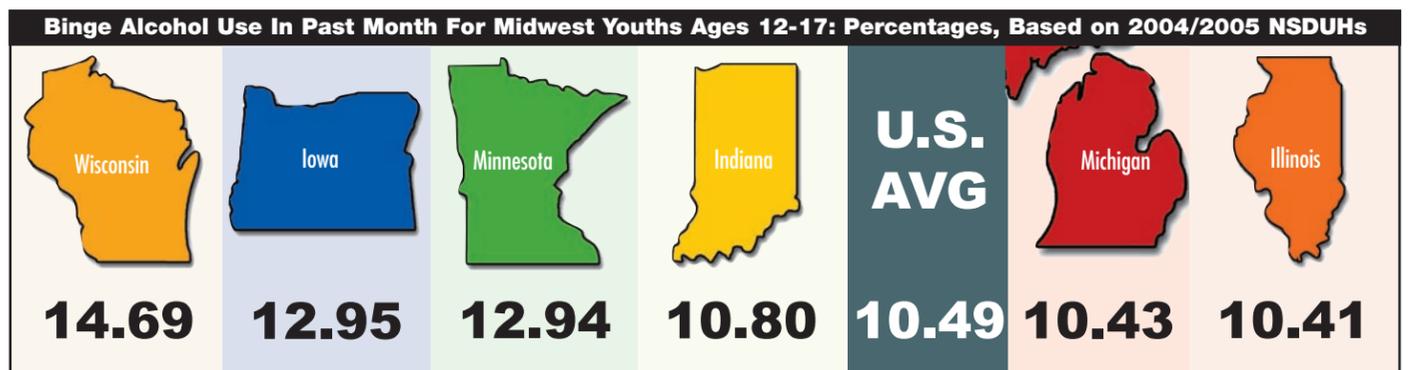
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Sheboygan, WI

This, according to a federal study released on February 28 that identifies states with the highest rates for underage drinking in youths 12-20 years of age. The sad reality? Wisconsin leads the nation with 39 percent of its young people reporting drinking in the past month. As school leaders, you know that underage drinking can compromise a youngster's ability to make sound decisions. Many children who drink to excess may be "self-medicating" an underlying depressive or other mental disorder. Binge drinking in particular has been found to be a risk factor for suicide. It's important that schools have strong yet supportive policies in place for children who may have substance-use and/or mental disorders. That's because given familial and situational components of these disorders, parents of troubled youngsters may themselves be grappling with issues—emotional, mental or alcohol related—that impede their ability to parent at a level that is optimal to their child's well-being.

SOURCE: SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, February 28, 2007 press release, "New SAMHSA Report Provides State-Level View of Substance Use and Mental Health," samhsa.gov/newsroom/advisories/0702282802.aspx



Helping hand [resources and assistance]

MHA HELPING TO PROTECT YOUR STUDENTS

Research suggests that youths adept at problem solving, conflict resolution and nonviolent handling of disputes have greater resiliency. This may reduce potential for suicide. Because youngsters can have suicidal thoughts that reoccur over time, programs that support and protect them should be ongoing, not one time only. The Mental Health Association of Wis. has gathered evidence-based and promising youth programs to promote mental well being, non-violence and diversity. These include anti-bullying, problem solving and coping skills enhancement, conflict resolution and violence prevention. Contact Brenda Jennings at MHA at brenda.mha@tds.net or visit mhawisconsin.org/education/suicideprevention/complementaryprograms.asp

WELL NOW

New from Wisconsin DPI

WHAT: The School Mental Health Toolkit

WHY: To help you increase capacity to intervene and engage in effective prevention

FOR: Administrators, pupil services personnel and health educators

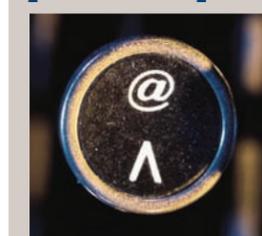
FEATURES: Evidence-based programs for school-based prevention

INCLUDES: Full-day training with comprehensive master CD including all materials, slides, handouts and tools for use in schools with a mental health curriculum for grades 8-10

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[talk back]



With this third issue, we invite you to tell us what you think of *Well Aware*, a suicide prevention resource for school leaders and administrators throughout Wisconsin. Contact us at talkback@wellaware.org and tell us what you think. We'd like to know more about your programs, policies and problems in making your schools safer, more conducive to learning—and your students more prone to succeed.