



Safe and Responsive Schools Guide

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School Sites

We are deeply grateful to the school teams and administrators of the SRS pilot and field test site schools who have worked so hard to implement new approaches to ensure the safety and well-being of their students. Their enthusiasm, ideas and support are genuinely appreciated!

SRS School Sites

Beatrice Public Schools, Beatrice, NE
Paddock Lane and Stoddard Elementary Schools
Lincoln and Cedar Elementary Schools

Forrest Hills Special Education Cooperative, Forrest Hills, IN

Gary Public Schools, Gary, IN
Lew Wallace High School
Alfred Beckman Middle School
James Whitcomb Riley Elementary School

Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln, NE
Beattie Elementary School
Robin Mickle Middle School

Malcolm Public Schools, Malcolm, NE
West Falls Elementary School and
Malcolm High School

Richland-Bean Blossom Community School Corporation, Richland, IN
Edgewood High School
Edgewood Junior High School

Spencer-Owen Community School Corporation
Owen Valley High School
Owen Valley Middle School
McCormick's Creek Elementary



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References for Section 3.....

Tools

Below are materials, forms, questionnaires and worksheets which are referred to in the chapters of this *Guide* in alphabetical order:

Evaluation Questionnaire.....

Needs Assessment Questionnaire.....

Planning Data Availability Worksheet

Practices and Programs Inventory.....

Research Worksheet

Research Results Worksheet.....

Safe Schools Survey Questionnaires-

 Parent Questionnaire

 Elementary Student Questionnaire.....

 Secondary Student Questionnaire.....

 Staff Questionnaire.....

Safety Survey Planning Worksheet

Strategic Planning Outline

Task Responsibility Worksheet.....



INTRODUCTION

There is much interest in assisting schools to better support the behavioral needs of students in school. These efforts are motivated by various problems in schools including violence, drug and alcohol use, bullying, harassment and other behaviors. They are also motivated by the desire to “leave no child behind” in our efforts to provide effective academic instruction in schools. Most educators realize that effective academic learning requires a safe, organized and civil learning environment, as well as the ability to shape and change the behavior of those having difficulty with their behavior.

Statewide Behavioral Initiatives

As a result, numerous states have embarked on statewide behavioral initiatives. While these vary tremendously in their goals, they are almost always broadly framed to provide assistance to schools to improve their ability to support positive student behavior in school. For example, Montana’s belief statements among others include:

- All students should be taught all the skills necessary for success.
- Schools are places where students can learn and practice positive interpersonal, cross-cultural, and citizenship skills.
- A caring school climate and positive relationships between students and staff are critical to student success and provide an environment where academics flourish.
- Positive, proactive and preventative efforts of schools and communities can create a school climate free of stereotyping, harassment, hatred and violence-filled with a concern for justice and fairness.

States have also included in their initiatives effort to reduce student dropout, reduce the frequency of absences and tardiness, decrease the use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco, decrease involvement in youth gangs and to reduce youth violence. Montana along with Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, New Mexico, Utah, and numerous other states have these types of initiatives, many within the context of their school improvement planning process. Most often these initiatives include the formation of building based teams which guide school and district level planning, changes in policies and procedures (systems change), comprehensive staff development, infrastructure development (such as the creation of behavior consultants or coaches), and the like. In addition, the State Departments of Education, sometimes with regional networks, provide technical support and consultation, and, in some cases funding to local districts for these activities.

While these initiatives have been clear about their goals, there is not one clear process for schools to achieve these goals. There is a huge amount of literature that analyzes these issues, and even more numerous suggestions about what schools and educators should do to reduce these problems. While many times, one specific approach is touted as “the answer” to these problems, and while some schools would like a simple, solution, the problems are much too complex. As a result, many schools may be looking for a more comprehensive and sophisticated approach which is tailored to a particular building’s strengths and needs, and which provides a comprehensive, integrated and long-term view of these problems. The SRS Framework and *Guide* may meet these needs.

The Safe and Responsive Schools Framework

The Safe and Responsive Schools *Guide* may be one way for schools to undertake a comprehensive planning process to address these behavioral issues. The Safe and Responsive Schools (SRS) Framework described in the *Guide* is an approach to improving the behavior of students at school, and to preventing school violence as well as other behavior related problems. The Framework identifies and acknowledges the informal “social curriculum” which students must learn in school in order to be academically successful in school, and suggests that for some students this social

curriculum must be explicitly taught. The Framework is a structure based on three groupings of students according to their learning of the social curriculum. It permits schools to engage in actions or strategies at each of three levels related to these groupings of students. These levels of action are:

- **Actions to Create a Positive Climate For All Students**
- **Actions to Identify and Intervene Early with “At-risk” Students**
- **Actions to Create Effective Responses to Students with Chronic or Severe Behavior Problems.**

School teams can use the Framework to assess existing behavior-related programs and activities in a school, to identify promising practices and programs that might be considered to supplement existing programs. The SRS Framework and *Guide* assist schools to undertake a comprehensive planning process, gather data and prioritize needed actions to create and implement a plan. This comprehensive plan should be integrated with the school’s “School Improvement” planning process to bring about long lasting systemic change to address positive behavior that supports academic goals.

The Safe and Responsive Schools Framework and *Guide* focuses on the identical outcomes as these various state-wide initiatives, and may be one concrete example of the kind of programs which these initiatives intend to promote.

What are “Positive Behavioral Supports”?

In addition to the various state behavioral initiatives, many schools have also embraced the concept of Positive Behavioral Supports. “Positive Behavioral Supports” (PBS), sometimes also called “Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), is also an approach to reforming the way schools think about student behavior in school. It employs a three-tier model of prevention (similar to the SRS levels) to understand behavior of students in school and to suggest interventions to improve behavior. However, there seem to be two versions of PBS, one broad, and the other quite specific.

The Broad Version of PBS. Sometimes PBS is used as an umbrella term to apply to almost any broad plan employing these three levels of prevention to assist

schools to improve the ways they address and teach behavior in schools. According to Sugai and Horner (2002, p. 131) the key features of PBS are:

1. A prevention-focused continuum of support;
2. Proactive instructional approaches to teaching & improving social behaviors;
3. Conceptually sound and empirically validated practices;
4. Systems change to support effective practices, and;
5. Data-based decision making.

Many states have adopted the features of PBS as guiding principals for their state initiatives. As you will see, the SRS Framework and Guide present a process to schools that is entirely compatible with these principles. The SRS Framework provides a structure for these principles to be implemented, and provides a comprehensive, individually tailored planning process for schools which choose to implement them.. The SRS Framework and process is an example of one way to create Positive Behavioral Supports in schools.

The Narrower Version of PBS. However, at some times, a much narrower version of PBS seems to be advocated. That version is narrow and specific and focuses on a “behaviorist,” school-wide approach to teaching and guiding behavior. This more specific approach focuses on schools implementing “the seven key features of effective behavior support” to create a school-wide culture of behavioral competence (Horner, Sugai & Todd, 2001). These seven features are:

1. Administrative leadership
2. Team-based implementation
3. Define behavioral expectations
4. Teach behavioral expectations
5. Acknowledge/ reward appropriate behavior
6. Monitor and correct behavioral errors
7. Use information for decision-making

In this more specific PBS process, teams of educators create a set of school rules, teach those rules, and provide a consistent way of responding to inappropriate behavior according to those rules. A small number of school-wide positive behaviors are identified, and school staff to provide reinforcement for those behaviors, and

consequences when violations of the rules occur. While this narrow version acknowledges the need for individual functional assessment and individual behavior plans for those students who need them, as well as other elements or programs, the later are not the emphasis.

While this narrow definition of PBS fits within the broader definition of PBS, it appears to be only a one example of an action that could be taken to address needs within the larger PBS principles, and does not help to coordinate or integrate behavior related programs such as character education, mediation, alternative school programs, etc., which may be in place or needed. While this version of PBS may be useful, it is much more limited in its goals and potential outcomes for schools.

Using the more narrow definition of PBS, the Safe and Responsive Schools Framework views this narrow version of PBS as one valuable strategy among many that a school might use to improve positive behavior in school. Defining behavioral expectations, teaching behavioral expectations, rewarding appropriate behavior, and monitoring and correcting behavioral errors may be very important, but they are not all that schools need to do to meet create safe and responsive school environments!

Regardless of the definition of PBS, the SRS Framework deals more broadly with prevention oriented programs on the one hand, and more specifically with emergency planning and intervention and options for students with the most chronic behavior problems on the other hand. It permits schools to include and integrate a variety of other approaches into a comprehensive model of violence prevention and behavior improvement. Schools desiring to implement the principles of either version of PBS should feel comfortable with the comprehensive planning process in the *SRS Guide*.

Safe & Responsive Schools in Context

In an era when improving student behavior in school is being recognized as key issue in improving a school's ability to meet academic instructional goals, the SRS Framework is a comprehensive and preventative planning process to improve behavior. It addresses the goals of most states' behavioral initiatives, and may be a useful tool for schools in those states to address the goals of their initiative. It may also be a way for

schools to implement Positive Behavioral Supports. However, even if no state initiatives exist, the SRS materials are self-standing and can be used by individual schools to plan and improve!

The first chapter of the Guide will explain its purpose and intended uses, as well as answer more questions. The Framework is explained in Chapter two. The chapters in Section Two provide detailed instructions for schools who wish to use the Framework to undertake a planning/implementation process. Finally, Section Three identifies options and resources for schools to consider in response to their needs.



DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW

SECTION I

CHAPTERS 1-2



CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE *GUIDE*

The Safe and Responsive Schools Framework is an approach to improving the behavior of students at school, and to preventing school violence. It is a structure which permits schools to engage in actions or strategies at each of three levels. These are:

- **Creating a Positive Climate**
- **Early Identification and Intervention**
- **Effective Responses**

School teams can use the Framework to assess current programs and activities in a school, to identify promising practices and programs which might be considered to supplement existing programs, and assist schools to prioritize actions needed.

Purpose

The purpose of this *Guide* is to provide assistance to schools in using the Safe and Responsive Schools Framework to assess, plan and implement efforts to address school violence prevention, discipline reform and behavior improvement. The *Guide* outlines a detailed process schools can follow to assess their current activities, gather and analyze needed information, and develop a comprehensive plan. It also assists schools in taking steps to implement their plan. The *Guide* is intended to provide a stand-alone set of procedures and information for a school to engage in such a planning and implementation process.

Who should use this *Guide*?

This *Guide* is intended primarily for the facilitator (chairperson) of a school building-based Safe and Responsive Schools Team. The formation of a team and the facilitator's roles are described in detail later in the *Guide*. The facilitator can share part or all of the *Guide* with all members of the team if that would be helpful.

Many times a building administrator may be a facilitator for the SRS Team, but if not, the *Guide* will also provide information about the SRS process and resources which may be of importance to all administrators, even those not on the team. Copies of the *Guide* should also be shared with administrators of other buildings and with district-level administrators for use in district-wide planning and coordination, and may be useful to district-wide safety and planning teams as well.

What is included in the *Guide*?

The *Guide* provides a brief overview about recent concerns related to school violence and discipline, and then describes the Safe and Responsive Schools (SRS) Framework. This framework is the basis for a school-based planning process to help schools improve behavior, reduce disciplinary problems and prevent school violence.

The *Guide* provides specific instructions for creating a school-based Safe and Responsive Schools Team. It suggests topics for discussion by the team, data which might be gathered and analyzed, information and ideas to be considered, and a process to create a Safe and Responsive School Plan. It includes sample schedules and agendas, procedures for the team and facilitator, examples of products to be created, as well as suggestions for obtaining resource materials and more information.

How is the *Guide* organized?

The *Guide* is comprised of three sections. In addition to this section, the “Overview and SRS Framework,” are “The Process Guide”; and “The Resource Guide.” Each of these is described below-

Section I: Overview and SRS Framework

This section provides an overview of the uses for, and the contents of the *Guide*. The overview tries to identify and answer some questions such as who the *Guide* is intended for, how it might be used, and how it fits with other related activities in a school. In addition this section provides a detailed description of the Safe and Responsive School “Framework”. This Framework or model is the structure on which the planning process and resources of the *Guide* are based.

Section II: The Process Guide

This section provides the information necessary to lead the team through the stages of a strategic planning process. Step by step guidance is given on carrying out and interpreting a needs assessment related to behavior, discipline and violence prevention. It includes creating vision and mission statements, gathering a variety of information, reviewing best practices, and developing, implementing and evaluating a school plan.

It also provides the necessary tools for your team to develop a SRS Plan including reproducible copies of the four SRS Safe Schools Surveys (i.e., Elementary Student, Secondary Student, Staff, and Parent) and the SRS Practices & Programs Inventory, as well as strategic planning worksheets to guide the team through the process of developing, implementing, and evaluating a school specific plan. This section also provide sample plans meeting schedules, agendas and other materials.

Section III: The Resource Guide

Although our knowledge of violence prevention is growing and changing, there are many implementation options available to schools. The *Resource Guide* provides school teams with a brief orientation on how to gather information and research about emerging topics related to violence prevention and behavior interventions. This will permit schools to find and employ the most current research available when making decisions about program implementation.

The next section of the *Resource Guide* is comprised of three sections organized by the three tiers of intervention in the SRS Framework. Each section will have a brief overview, and an outline of the many of the intervention topics that might be included at a particular level of intervention. Each topic at that level will then be described in a brief paragraph with preliminary references, or in an individual “fact sheet”. Where available, each fact sheet will provide an overview of that topic, a summary of the current status of research on the topic, and key issues in implementation of that idea. The Fact Sheets typically include contact information and web links to a variety of materials or reports related to the fact sheet topic. Additional resources and fact sheets will be posted to the project websites (<http://www.unl.edu/srs> or <http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/>) as they are created.

Why the focus on the school?

While the *Guide* might be of use at the district level, and it is also possible that some of the *Guide*'s contents could be translated to the individual classroom level, the *Guide* focuses on school-wide planning and implementation. We believe that the school is the most useful and most powerful level to address overall behavioral issues. This *Guide* is intended to be useful for individual school buildings whether at the elementary or secondary level. While individual teachers might translate some of the Safe and Responsive Schools Framework to the classroom level, without school-wide implementation, the needed structure across all three levels will not be possible. It may be even more powerful for the *Guide* to be used across an entire school district, or at least multiple schools, as this will promote efficiency and consistency in implementing the Framework. A district wide team may also be employed to coordinate activities and resources across individual buildings, and to do a parallel district wide planning process to building level planning in described in this *Guide*.

Can the *Guide* be modified or adapted?

While the *Guide* will provide a blueprint for a complete process, it is up to the team and leadership at each school to decide how to best use these materials. Some

parts of the process may have already have been completed at some locations, or may not be relevant to all situations. Therefore, we expect that the *Guide* will be adapted to local needs. Nevertheless, we hope that the integrity of doing a thorough, comprehensive, building-level assessment and planning process will be maintained. In that context we invite schools to adapt these materials as is appropriate to their varying circumstances.

How was this *Guide* developed?

The *Safe and Responsive School Guide* was an outgrowth of the ideas and workshops developed by Russell J. Skiba, Indiana University and Reece L. Peterson, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This was followed by a federally funded “Project of National Significance” at the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs on Safe and Responsive Schools (Project #H325N9900099). The project structure and content originated with the Project Co-directors, but the process described in this *Guide* was developed and adapted through a field site development process involving multiple local school sites. During the first two years, this included one small city school system in Nebraska (five schools- three teams) that worked with the project through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and two small school districts in Indiana (seven schools and teams) that worked with the project through Indiana University. These sites are listed on the acknowledgements page of this *Guide* and on the project websites. Various parts of the *Guide* were developed throughout the first two years of the project, resulting in a complete draft by the end of the second year of the project. The draft was then revised during the remaining period of the project.

Has this *Guide* been field-tested?

Before the beginning of the third school year of the project, a copy of the *Draft Guide* was delivered to all of the original schools, and also to seven additional school sites. This included six schools in two medium urban school systems, as well as one very small school system with only two schools (See list on Acknowledgements page of this *Guide* or the SRS websites identified at the end of this Chapter). The original

sites, as well as the new sites were asked during the third project year to start fresh and follow the procedures outlined in the *Draft Guide* as completely as possible. During this year, process and procedures were refined, and additional content added to the *Guide*. In addition, the participating schools all provided input on the *Guide* itself via questionnaires or focus groups, including suggestions for improvement and evaluations of the impact of the *Guide* for their school. These suggestions were used to develop this current version of the *Guide*.

Extensive data, useful ideas, and various examples developed at the project sites have been gathered as well, and are used in the *Guide* as illustrations and examples. While there was field-testing of these materials with some schools, further field-testing of this *Guide* will occur in the future and is desired.

What have experts said about the *Guide*?

In addition to the field-testing, during the third year of the project, the *Draft Guide* was sent to an expert panel of four nationally recognized experts in school behavior, discipline and school violence (See Acknowledgement page and websites). The reviewers felt very positive about the materials, and made additional suggestions for improvement in the *Guide*, which have been incorporated.

Terminology

Safety. The Safe and Responsive Schools Project includes the word “safe” and focuses on “safety” as it related to student behavior and violence. While we will use the word safety in this context, we realize that safety at school many involve many other elements such as bus and playground safety, safety in the handling of food, safety in storms or accidents, etc. While these other types of safety are also important, they are not directly a part of this program and will not be addressed in the Safe and Responsive Schools Framework.

Team. In the *Guide*, Team refers to the Safe and Responsive School team described in the *Guide*. Considerations in forming this team are discussed later

(Chapter 3), and it may be possible that an existing team or committee with a different name may be serving as the SRS team.

Facilitator. In this *Guide*, the Facilitator is leader or chairperson of the Safe and Responsive Schools team. That person may be a teacher, counselor, psychologist, administrator, or a person in another role. Some teams have identified co-facilitators. The Guide provides direct guidance for the Facilitator in creating and assisting the team in the SRS planning process.

The facilitator may also serve a role as a “coach” who is able to rally support and enthusiasm for the efforts of the team to move forward in the Safe and Responsive School planning process. Like a good coach, the facilitator should acknowledge and reinforce the good work of team members, and should identify problems with the team and take appropriate action to correct them quickly.

Notes to assist the facilitator can be found throughout this *Guide*.

How can the *Guide* & related materials be accessed?

The latest available research reports, field testing information and copies of the *Guide* and other related materials can be found on the project websites at:

<http://www.unl.edu/srs> or <http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/> . Or may be obtained from the authors at the addresses listed.

Summary Box 1.

Summary Chapter 1 - Overview of the Guide

- **The SRS Framework**
An approach to improving the behavior of students at school, and to preventing school violence based on targeting three levels of action:
 - Creating a Positive Climate.
 - Early Identification and Intervention
 - Effective Responses
- **The purpose of the *Guide* is to provide assistance to schools in using the Safe and Responsive Schools Framework to assess, plan and implement efforts to address school violence prevention, discipline reform and behavior improvement.**
- **The Safe and Responsive Schools *Guide* consists of three parts:**
 - Overview and the SRS Framework
 - The Process Guide
 - The Resource Guide
- **The Guide is for school based teams, and in particular for the “facilitators” of these teams**
 - *Adapted.* The Guide can be adapted to meet the needs of your school.
 - *Developed & Field Tested.* The Guide materials were developed in close cooperation with several schools who provided input over three years.
 - *Experts.* A panel of experts also had input into the Framework and Guide.
- **Obtaining the Safe and Responsive Schools *Guide* & related materials**
 - <http://www.unl.edu/srs> or <http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/>



CHAPTER 2 THE SRS FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In the past several years, incidents of dramatic and shocking violence have left teachers and students shaken and nervous about the potential for violence at their own school. A rash of copycat threats in school districts throughout the nation, and the seeming normalcy of many of the shooters, has led to the inevitable but uncomfortable conclusion that serious violence could erupt anywhere, at any time.

These concerns lead to an increasing focus on preventing school violence. Should we implement prevention programs to improve school climate and teach students civility? Can we identify early warning signs before the eruption of violence? Is it necessary to rely on zero tolerance and increased use of suspension and expulsion in the face of school disruption, or are there other options? How can schools be prepared to cope with an event of school violence or crisis? Is school violence related to other types of inappropriate or disruptive behavior in school? What types of strategies for violence prevention have been most effective, and how can they be implemented?

Data on school violence may also lead to a surprising conclusion about the importance of day-to-day discipline. In one study of rural educators, a majority of teachers and administrators agreed that violence was worsening at their school (Peterson, Beekley, Speaker & Pietrzak, 1996). But the behaviors they reported as escalating were not drugs, gangs and weapons offenses, but rather behaviors indicating incivility such as rumors and peer escalation of violent events, verbal intimidation and threats, pushing and shoving, and sexual harassment. Similarly, national surveys report that schools with fewer disciplinary problems in general also report fewer incidents of serious crime.

These findings have tremendously important implications, for they say that what we do in our schools on a day-to-day basis in terms of discipline may be related to the prevention of serious crime and violence. By implementing comprehensive programs

that improve overall school climate and reduce minor disruption, schools may be able to reduce the risk of more serious violent incidents.

The message of the *Safe and Responsive Schools (SRS) Guide* is that we can develop a variety of school-based programs that can significantly reduce the threat of serious violence and disruption. These programs may also reduce other more minor behavior problems, and can have a very positive effect on academic progress of students as well. The *SRS Guide* is based on extensive and direct involvement with twenty schools in two states, in urban, suburban and rural settings. The planning process and information provided by the *Guide* draws from the experiences of educators and administrators who developed SRS plans for their own schools.

An effective technology of school safety begins with knowledge and understanding. While it is beyond the scope of this *Guide* to describe all of the current knowledge about school violence prevention, it will assist schools to address many of these questions. The purposes of the *SRS Guide* are to:

- **Provide a Process** for schools to conduct a comprehensive assessment of their violence prevention, discipline and behavior improvement efforts, and develop a strategic plan for making these efforts more complete and effective.
- **Provide Information and Resources** about the available options schools may have to implement effective practices that strengthen their violence prevention and behavior improvement efforts.

What Do We Know About School Violence?

Overall, youth violence in the United States has increased at an alarming rate in the last fifteen years. Homicide has become the second leading cause of death for persons aged 15 to 24, and the leading cause of death for African-Americans in this age group. Between 1985 and 1994, annual arrest rates for weapons possession for youth less than 18 years of age increased 104% (Centers for Disease Control, 1996; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1996). **Are More Current Stats Available?**

Yet little of the violence reported for children and youth occurs in school; nor do national data show that the problem is getting worse (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams & Farris, 1998; Chandler, Chapman, Rand & Taylor, 1998). Less than one percent of homicides and suicides among school children in the period from 1992 to 1994 were school-associated (**Reference need here**). With a school homicide rate of less than one in a million, the chances of violent death among juveniles are almost 40 times as great out of school as in school. While shocking and senseless shootings give the impression of dramatic increases in school-related violence, national surveys consistently find that school violence has stayed essentially stable or even decreased slightly over time (see the websites listed in the box).

Unfortunately, not all schools are equally safe. National data suggests that middle and high schools, especially larger schools, are more at-risk for serious violence (**Reference needed**). Moreover, students in urban schools serving predominantly lower socio-economic status (SES) minority children are twice as likely to be victims of violence as students in suburban, town or rural areas (**Reference needed here. Isn't this**

Figure 1.	
Sources of Information	Web Addresses
National Center for Education Statistics <i>Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-1997, Students' Reports of School Crime: 1998 and 1995, and Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1998</i> and subsequent reports.	http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubic1=98030 or http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch and enter NCES #98030 and http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98.crime and http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch and enter NCES #98251
U.S. Department of Education <i>Annual Report on School Safety, October, 1998</i> and subsequent reports	http://www.ed.gov/pubs/AnnSchoolRept98 and subsequent reports.
Justice Policy Institute <i>School House Hype: School Shootings and the Real Risks Kids Face in America</i>	http://www.cjcj.org/ Go to this site and type the report title in the search box.

mostly out of school violence?). In addressing the tragic incidents that have occurred recently in suburban and rural schools, it is critical that the more ongoing and severe problems of lower socio-economic standing (SES) urban schools and students not be forgotten or ignored.

Thus, data seems to fly in the face of teacher, student and public opinion that school violence is extremely serious and getting worse. But while school shootings involving multiple victims are still extremely rare from a statistical standpoint, statistics are hardly reassuring as long as the possibility exists that it could happen in *our* school, to *our* children. It is no doubt healthier that we seek to develop effective programs to prevent *any* death on school grounds rather than to become accustomed to increasingly horrific levels of violence in our nation's schools.

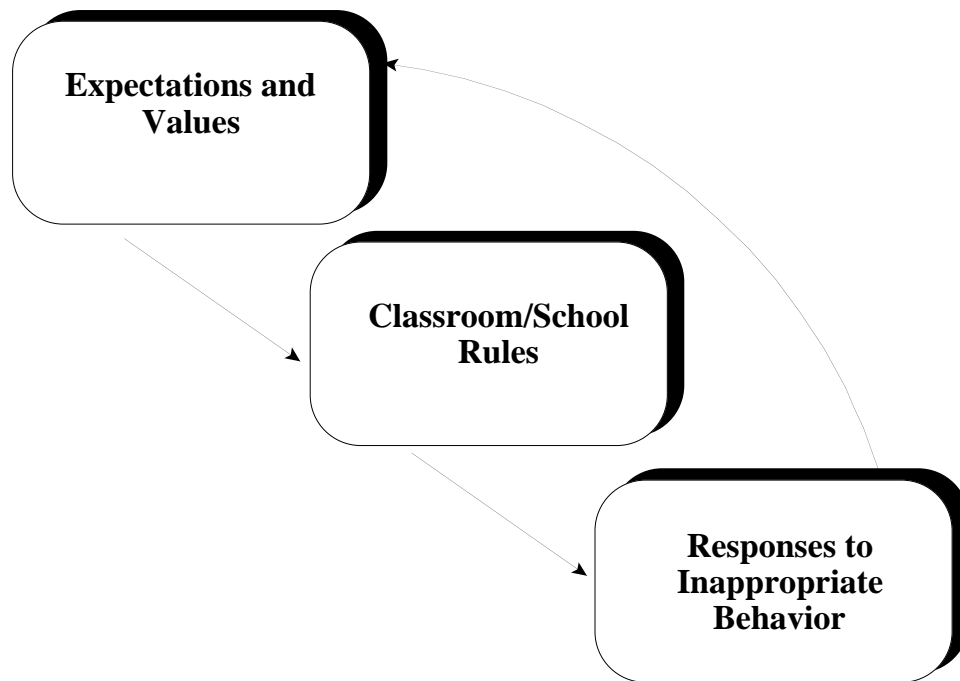
Teaching the Social Curriculum

Although school discipline has come to be associated with punishment and exclusion, the word *discipline* comes from the same Latin root as the word *disciple*: *discipere*, to teach or comprehend. Thus, the Safe and Responsive Schools model is grounded in the notion of discipline as instruction, or *teaching the social curriculum*.

What is the Social Curriculum?

In every school and classroom, there is a social curriculum that acts as a guide for student behavior throughout the school day. Though rarely as explicit as the written materials that constitute the academic curriculum, it is no less important in determining whether a student succeeds. As shown in Figure 1, schools and teachers constantly make their expectations known to students through verbal explanations, rules, and consequences. In a well-run classroom, these three components work together to teach students how they should behave in order to succeed in the classroom. In hundreds of interactions a day, the correspondence between expectations, rules, and consequences allows students to learn each classroom's unique social curriculum.

Figure 2. Components of the Social Curriculum. Classroom and school expectations define the desired social and behavioral climate of the school and classroom. These expectations are operationalized through classroom and school rules, and through positive and negative responses students receive to their behavior. The consistency of expectations, rules, and consequences teaches students about whether the “true” expectations of the school or classroom are consistent with stated policies.



In less well-managed classrooms and schools, inconsistency among expectations, rules, and consequences provides less opportunity for learning the implicit expectations of the social curriculum, and may even give students conflicting messages about the appropriate way to behave in a given classroom or school situation. Teacher expectations that the classroom will be an engaging learning environment stressing student initiative may be contradicted by an authoritarian or demeaning disciplinary style. Disciplinary responses that are inconsistent with written rules or unfair to certain students (see below on minority disproportionality in discipline) may give students the message that what those in authority say is not as important as what they do. For students who are sufficiently good observers, even consequences that are inconsistent with stated rules provide valuable instruction about the "real rules" of the classroom. For others, however,

understanding and behaving within the classroom's social curriculum is difficult. Those students need explicit instruction in the social curriculum.

Who Needs Instruction in the Social Curriculum?

Which students are likely to benefit from instruction in the social curriculum? The brief answer is that although there are clearly some children who need extensive social instruction, all children may need some social instruction regarding some issues.

The majority of students come to school with the ability to recognize teacher expectations and succeed in adapting their behavior to fit the classroom, regardless of how well those expectations are presented. For students who exhibit behavior problems, however, learning the social curriculum is by no means an automatic process. These students come into the classroom with perceptions and beliefs, growing out of their experience, that may leave them less capable of recognizing and responding to the typical social curriculum of schools. The literature in the field of conduct disorders illustrates how this process might operate. First, children who display non-compliant, aggressive, or antisocial behavior are often the victim of coercive interchanges in their family that have taught them that the most effective way to avoid abuse is to become increasingly abusive themselves. Second, in the face of extreme parental inconsistency, some children learn to act out to establish the limits, even if it means exposing themselves to harsh punishment. Third, perhaps as a result of unsafe or threatening home and community conditions, conduct disordered children develop an antisocial cognitive set, striking first and asking questions later. Finally, well-documented links between antisocial behavior and academic underachievement suggest that, as the difficulty of academic material increases, students with behavior problems will turn to off task and disruptive behavior in order to escape from academic demands (Center, Deitz & Kaufman, 1982).

It is not hard to see how exposure to these risk factors could leave a child with a very different understanding of "how the world works." Students who have experienced coercive family cycles (Patterson, 1992) may view a teacher request for compliance as just the beginning of a long battle that they need to resist as quickly and firmly as possible. When faced with unstructured classroom situations, children from inconsistent home environments may act out in order to understand the limits of their environment

(Wahler, Williams, & Cerezo, 1990). Students who experience daily personal threat in their home or community may strike out first in ambiguous social situations in order to avoid being aggressed against (Dodge, 1993). Finally, in school settings where academic performance is the yardstick of worth, students with a history of academic failure (Hinshaw, 1992) may strive, not to complete work, but to engage in off-task and disruptive behavior in order to escape from academic demands (Center, Deitz, & Kaufman, 1982).

Thus, the experiences of students at-risk for behavior problems leave them with social perceptions that are a poor fit with the standard expectations of most school environments. Acting out of these experiences and perceptions, the behavior of these students appears disruptive, irresponsible, or incomprehensible to teachers and administrators. But to the student whose experience has yielded a different set of social expectations, these behaviors may seem perfectly sensible, and in fact their only alternative. Our consequences, however rational they may appear to us, may seem highly unfair to those students, since they are acting in the only way they can, in accord with the only world they know. Without explicit instruction in the expectations of the social curriculum, it is highly likely that these students will fail both socially and academically.

Although some students have a particular need for explicit instruction in social competencies, it is probably also true that all students need some instruction in some skills at some point. The media violence that pervades our culture has been linked with increased levels of negative and aggressive interactions among both children and adolescents (Paik & Comstock, 1994). Surveys of high school students reveal a startlingly high proportion who are unaware of effective methods for solving social conflict (Opatow, 1991). Instruction for all students in the social curriculum may thus help address widespread misconceptions among today's youth about the nature of conflict and problem solving.

The Safe and Responsive Schools Framework

The Safe and Responsive Schools (SRS) Framework assists schools in implementing a comprehensive and preventive process for addressing school violence,

and for improving student behavior at school. The SRS Framework also assists schools to teach the social curriculum to all students, focusing special attention on those students who need explicit instruction and structure to learn it. The process is intended to enable schools and school districts to develop a broader perspective on school safety, stressing comprehensive planning, prevention, and parent/community involvement. It incorporates our best knowledge of school-wide behavior planning in a comprehensive model of systems change in school violence prevention, discipline reform and behavior change.

Components of Safe and Responsive Schools

In response to school violence, many schools have turned to harsh zero tolerance disciplinary procedures. Yet there is little evidence that such approaches make a positive contribution to school safety or improved student behavior (**Reference?**). Other schools have adopted just one program, such as a violence prevention curriculum, as their response to concerns about violence and behavior. Instead of a simplistic approach, our best data suggest that a comprehensive and preventive model is more likely to ensure safe schools and promote civil behavior.

- **Comprehensive.** Many efforts to reduce violence are narrowly focused, usually assuming that one new add-on program will be sufficient. Instead the Safe and Responsive Schools Framework addresses a complete range of potential actions schools might take. It assists schools in gathering data or indicators, helps participating schools to understand the important program components that they may already have in place, and assists schools in developing plans to implement new programs or interventions which address that school's needs. Moreover, it is important for schools to understand those students whom specific interventions are intended to serve. In addition it is important to understand the connections between programs. Programs that are mutually supportive result in a whole building approach and create a much stronger plan than a haphazard assembly of independent programs.

- **Preventative.** There is growing consensus that the best way to deal with violence is to prevent it from occurring. This involves preventing the conditions that foster inappropriate behavior that can lead to violence, as well as preventing students who have acted violently, or disruptively, from engaging in these behaviors again.

The Safe and Responsive Schools Framework provides a structure for a comprehensive approach to violence prevention and behavior improvement. It is oriented towards the prevention of all kinds of behavior problems, by fostering civility and creating community in schools so that academic and social learning can be enhanced.

Guiding Assumptions of the Framework

With its focus on a planning process, using available resources, determining strengths and identifying needs, the Safe and Responsive Schools Framework differs from other school safety efforts focused on simply adding a new program or function. The SRS Framework focuses on creating a comprehensive view of violence prevention and behavior improvement, and provides a structure for planning and making systems change occur in a school.

Needs and Readiness

The framework makes several assumptions about schools' needs and readiness for violence prevention and behavior improvement:

- **Schools have Some Things in Place.** Most schools are already doing some things that may be useful components of a violence prevention plan.
- **Schools are Missing Some Pieces.** Most schools have at least some components of comprehensive violence prevention and behavior improvement model that are either missing or inadequate.
- **The People in Schools are Motivated.** Most school staff, students and communities are motivated to prevent violence and improve student behavior at school.

- **Coordination and Integration are Needed.** Schools can be helped greatly if their existing and proposed activities related to violence prevention could be coordinated and integrated with each other to create a more comprehensive, intense whole. It is helpful to know how the various pieces fit with and support the others to make a comprehensive whole.
- **A Comprehensive Understanding is Lacking.** Most schools and educators do not have an overall understanding of the necessary elements of a comprehensive violence prevention program.

Positive Outcomes

Violence prevention efforts and activities can have positive effects on many other school goals and are connected to improvements in behavior and academic performance of all students:

- **Violence is Preventable.** In response to fears about violence, schools and communities often focus on reactions to disruption and violence. Yet we know that major violence is linked with day-to-day disciplinary issues, such as bullying and incivility. Our best data suggests that attention to school climate and prevention is a much more promising approach to improving student behavior and preventing disruption and violence. **(Reference?)**
- **Reducing Violence Reduces Other Negative Behaviors.** Efforts to reduce violence are related to efforts to prevent or diminish other inappropriate behaviors in school. There is great overlap between the interventions to reduce violence and interventions to reduce school drop out, student drug and alcohol use, teen pregnancy, school academic failure, and other problematic behavior. Efforts to prevent violence will likely prevent other problems as well.
- **Violence Prevention Enhances Positive Behaviors.** Efforts to reduce violence and other inappropriate behavior are related to efforts to increase desirable and socially appropriate behavior in school. Expanding positive behavior in schools reduces violence and inappropriate behavior.

- **Violence Prevention Enhances Academic Performance.** There is a strong connection between interventions to reduce violence and interventions that enhance student's academic performance. Prevention and climate efforts create enhanced academic learning for all students.

The Process of Change

Change is never easy, and change within schools will require understanding, motivation and sustained effort.

- **There is No Quick Fix.** It is human nature to look for the quickest and easiest way to solve a problem. Yet problems of school violence and disruption are complex and will not be fixed by the latest educational trends, or commercial programs claiming to have “the answer”.
- **Inside Knowledge, Thinking and Planning are Needed.** It is unlikely that outside experts will be able to make suggestions that will significantly alter a school's overall ability to prevent violence or improve behavior. The input, involvement and understanding of a school's students, parents, teachers and administrators are all important in creating and sustaining positive change. “Local” knowledge about the daily routines and the particular climate of a particular school are important.
- **Change Takes Time, Resources, and Coordinated Effort.** Improving safety and school climate does not happen overnight. Even with the best of plans, change can be frustratingly slow. If the improvements we desire are to occur at all, there must be a commitment on the part of school staff to take the time to work and plan together. That effort is more likely to be successful if it involves all those who we expect to be affected by change, including students, parents, and the community.

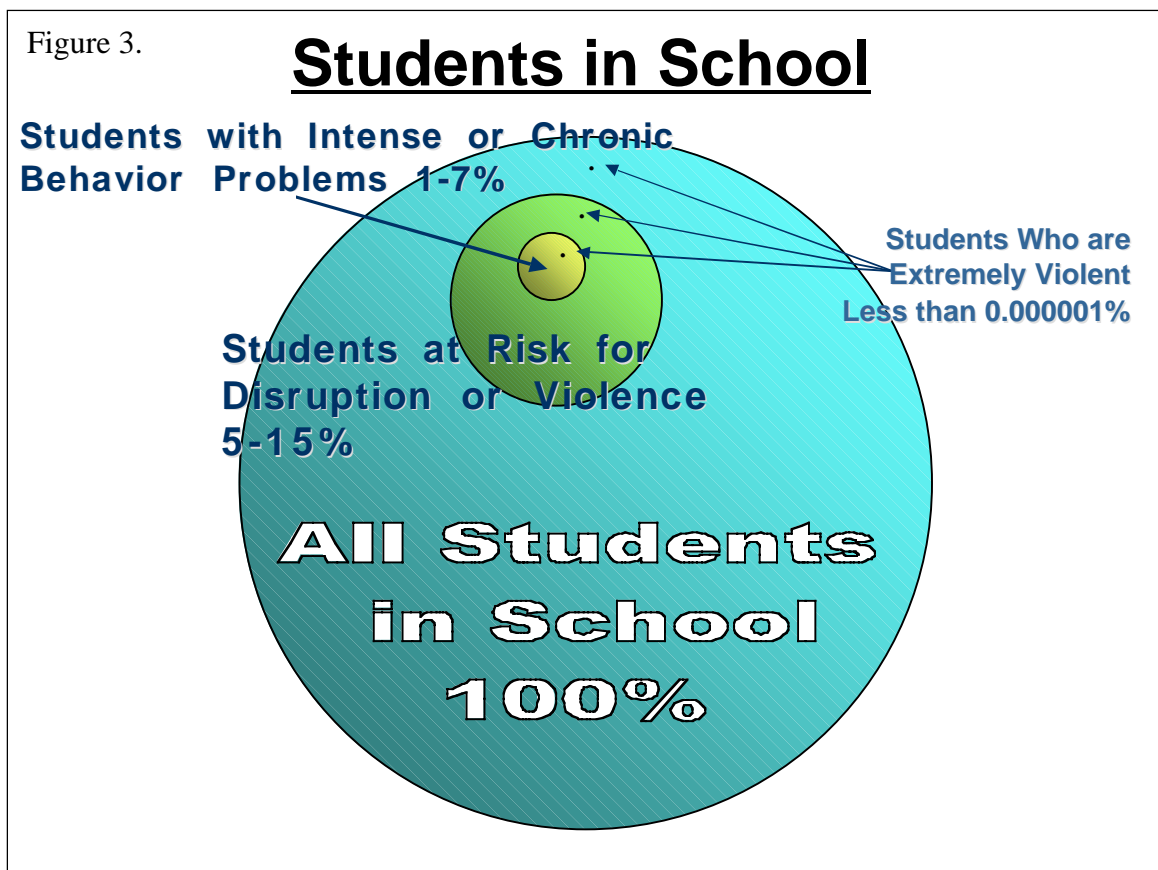
Together these assumptions about needs, outcomes and process suggest that it will be necessary to understand both major and minor threats to safety and civility in schools, so that we can develop a comprehensive and preventive approach to school safety. At

first, such changes may seem small and dependent on a few individuals, but over time, a comprehensive process has the power to reshape the climate of our school communities.

Students and Behavior in School

As a way to structure our thinking about violence prevention, as well as our actions and interventions, the Safe and Responsive Schools Framework identifies three groupings of students (See Figure 3):

- **Students With Minimum Risk.** A large number of students with few, if any, behavior problems and very small likelihood of engaging in violence. This group is estimated to be 85-95% of all students.



- **Students At-Risk.** A number of students, approximately 5-15%, who may be showing in various ways that they are having difficulties at school, and as a

result are at-risk for school problems such as academic difficulties, absences, inappropriate behavior and the like. If these problems worsen, or the warning signs these students are providing are ignored, these students may be more likely to develop more serious or violent behaviors, as well as other school problems.

- **Students with Intense or Chronic Behavior Problems.** A small number of students, approximately 1-7%, who already have serious or chronic behavior problems and who are already the focus of much time and energy in most schools. Some of these students have chronic encounters with the school discipline system, some are in special education programs on account of their behavior, and many are having serious problems at home or in the community as well as at school.

There are also a very small number of extremely violent students (much less than one in one million students) who may engage in violence similar to the school shooting incidents of the past several years. Very violent students might come from any one of these three groups, and as a result it is our belief that interventions, which focus on these three groups, may also prevent the very rare instances of extreme violence.

Three Levels of Action

The Safe and Responsive Schools Framework emphasizes concern for student behavior and related interventions by suggesting that schools should have different sets of actions or strategies for each of these three groups of students (See Figure 4). While some strategies cut across these levels or tiers, they are helpful in organizing the kinds of prevention and intervention strategies schools should have in place. The levels are:

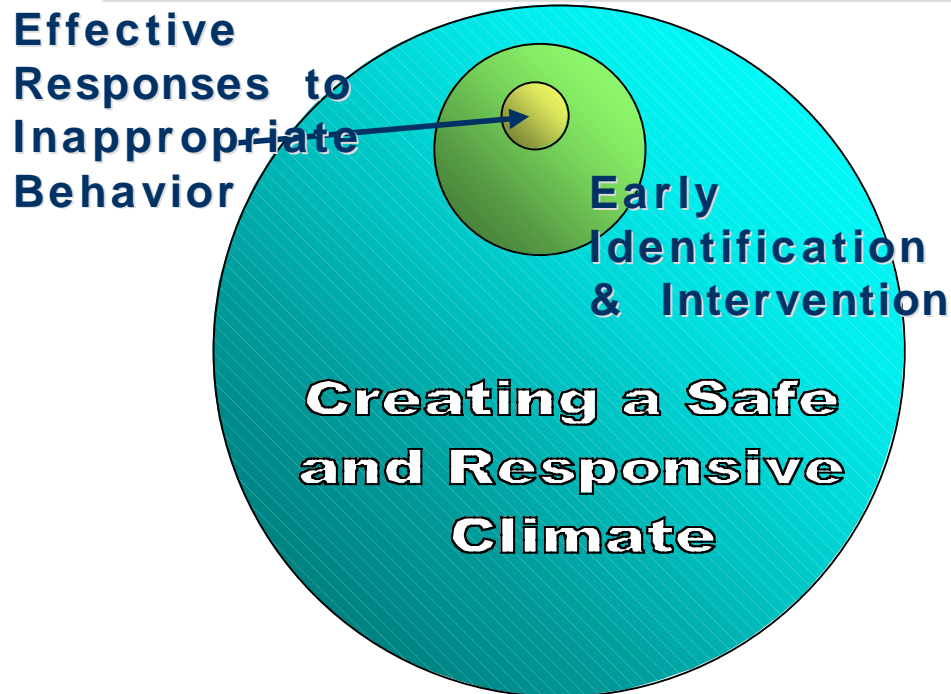
- **Creating a Positive Climate** promotes civility and teaches all students alternatives to violence with an emphasis on building a strong school community through increased caring, attentiveness, and feelings of belonging and support. Possible strategies include school-wide preventive programs such as conflict management and peer mediation, bullying prevention,

increased skills and knowledge in classroom behavior management, and parent involvement.

- **Early Identification and Intervention** identifies specific students who are at-risk for academic or behavioral difficulties through such methods as office referral information, absences or other data. Specific assistance is then provided for those students through programs such as mentoring, tutoring anger management training programs in order to keep students who are at-risk from developing more serious problems.

Figure 4

Three Levels of Action



- **Effective Responses** to serious or persistent behavior problems address the needs of students who are chronically disruptive, inappropriate or violent through increased disciplinary alternatives, behavior intervention plans, and alternative programs, as well as adequate preparations for school-wide crisis and extreme behavioral problems.

Using the Framework

Multiple options are available for schools to implement programs and procedures at each of these three levels, but often these programs and procedures are not integrated or coordinated with each other. The Safe and Responsive Schools Framework assists schools to assess and coordinate existing programs and procedures as well as to identify needs for new programs and procedures. This framework addresses the complexity of preventing violence and addressing student emotional and behavior problems, and requires comprehensive planning and intervention. Yet it does not require all schools to look alike on these issues, but rather encourages schools to develop plans that correspond to the needs and the culture their own school. The *SRS Process Guide* provides step-by-step guidance for schools in decision-making using the framework, and offers schools choices regarding how best to address their needs. The *SRS Resource Guide* provides information about programs that are possible and how they fit into the framework. Thus the Safe and Responsive Schools Framework includes both the process and the resources schools need to implement the comprehensive framework.

The Safe & Responsive Schools Planning Process

The SRS Process relies upon a team-based approach to help participating schools restructure school discipline and school safety practices. This team of school leaders (including faculty, administrators, parents and students) will work together in a systems change process that includes activities in the following areas:

- **Needs Assessment:** Defining the strengths and needs of the school in the areas of discipline and school safety, including an inventory of existing programs, and identification of persons responsible for various tasks related to these topics.
- **Promising Practices Review:** Assessing available options for violence prevention and improving student behavior.

- **Plan Development:** Developing a Safe & Responsive Schools Plan, containing at least one strategy from each of the three framework components.
- **Plan Implementation:** Organizing resources, training and activities to begin to implement the contents of a Safe & Responsive Schools Plan,
- **Evaluation of Outcomes:** Identifying desired outcomes, and beginning to implement evaluation procedures to determine the impact of implemented interventions and systems changes.

Planning Process Outcomes

By the end of the SRS Planning Process your team can expect to gain the following:

- **Understanding Strengths and Needs** in your school for preventing school violence, reducing disruption and enhancing school climate.
- **Awareness of Strategies and Promising Practices** for preventing violence and disruption, and how they could be implemented in your school.
- **Knowledge of Resources Needed** for implementing effective strategies in your school.

In addition, the team will have created at least two documents:

- **A Safe and Responsive School Plan** that tailors specific strategies and interventions to the needs of your school.
- **An Evaluation Plan** to track key variables to determine whether the SRS Plan is making a difference.

More Information on Safe & Responsive Schools

Additional information about the Safe and Responsive Schools (SRS) Framework as well as other related topics such as “zero tolerance” policies, minority over-representation and school discipline policies can be found in the resources in Figure 5.

Figure 5.

Additional Reference & Resource Materials

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Summary Box 2.

Summary Chapter 2 – The SRS Framework

- **While the media may give the impression that school violence is increasing, it is not.**
 - Between home, community and school, the school is the safest environment for children.
 - Middle and high schools have the highest risk, although even that is low
 - Lower SES and minority children are more at risk also.
- **The social curriculum are the classroom and school expectations for desired behavior**
 - Some students need explicit instruction in the social curriculum.
 - All students need some supports to learn the social curriculum.
- **Assumptions are described related to needs and readiness, outcomes, and the process of change.**
- **The SRS Framework identifies three groups of students**
 - Students With Minimum Risk
 - Students At-risk
 - Students with Chronic or Severe Behavior Problems
- **Three tiers of interventions are possible in the SRS Framework related to three groups of students:**
 - Creating a Positive Climate.
 - Early Identification and Intervention.
 - Effective Responses
- **The Framework employs a systems change process that includes:**
 - *Needs Assessment.* Define the strengths and needs of your school in the areas of discipline and school safety.
 - *Promising Practices Review.* Assess available options.
 - *Plan Development.* Develop a Safe & Responsive Schools Plan, containing at least one strategy from each of the three levels of intervention.
 - *Plan Implementation and Evaluation of Outcomes.*
- **Planning Process Outcomes to expect at the end of one school year:**
 - An understanding of strengths and needs.
 - An awareness of strategies and promising practices.
 - Knowledge of resources needed.
 - A Safe and Responsive Schools plan.
 - Implementation and evaluation of plan

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