

## **2018 Report from Student/Staff Safety Summits Held in Grand Junction, Ft. Morgan and Pueblo**

The day started with a plenary session at all three of the locations. Please see the notes below from the sessions with cyberbullying expert, Sameer Hinduja Ph.D. The plenary was followed by four focus groups attended by all the middle and high school students present in a rotating fashion. The first numbered notes below are summaries of those focus group discussions.

### **1. Healthy Relationships/Sexting Prevention Focus Groups:**

In the **Healthy Relationships/Sexting Prevention Workshop**, students were given the opportunity to express what works in school-based programming, and what is ineffective. Specifically, they were asked what adults are doing that is annoying or pointless when it comes to helping them navigate healthy relationships, and what does or could work. They came up with great suggestions in both areas. To summarize, Colorado youth we surveyed reported:

#### **What DOES NOT Work:**

- Fear-based tactics
- The use of religion or morality
- Negativity
- Silence/Avoidance

#### **What DOES or COULD Work:**

- Education (sexual health, cyber safety, and legal education--by an expert in the field). They agreed it's a bonus if the education is entertaining!
- "Ask-ability" ("Having an adult I can have a real conversation with")
- A day/hour dedicated to "Stop and Delete"--the concept here is that the entire school would cease activities so students could simultaneously get on their devices, clean up their social media profiles to show them in their best light, change passwords, and delete questionable posts and images

It was an honor to hear their thoughtful responses, and to engage with them on these important topics. They are wise and motivated to make their communities safer.

*Margaret Ochoa, JD. CSSRC Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Specialist*

### **2. Suicide Prevention & Intervention Focus Groups:**

**Students were asked what factors they believe contribute to youth suicide in Colorado:**

- Stress both at home and at school
- Social media: cyberbullying and false expectations created by others that students feel pressure to live up to
- Loss
- Bullying

- Lack of caring from friends and school staff
- Mental health issues and stigma about getting help
- Loneliness and isolation
- Discrimination
- Low self esteem

**Students offered these solutions:**

- Listen to students and pay attention to body language
- Be accepting and approachable
- More mental health resources
- Kindness campaigns in schools
- Support groups
- Teach students stress reducing techniques
- Teach students other feeling words so, "I want to kill myself," is not their default when they can't name other feelings.
- Find ways to lessen pressure and afford students more time to sleep

Unanimously students answered that they would tell a trusted adult if a friend were suicidal! However, as a backup, many students said their schools did not have Safe2Tell. I hope this will be rectified.

The students were so very caring and concerned about one another. We need to engage them in solving this huge problem. They will be the ones to reduce the stigma.

*Chris Harms, MS, CSSRC Director*

**3. Bullying Prevention and Intervention Focus Groups:**

Our conversation about bullying prevention in schools began with a discussion about the differences between bullying behaviors and normal conflict. Students were then asked what is working; what kinds of programs are being implemented in their schools to help stop bullying behavior. Many schools have started having good citizenship weeks or events in which positive behaviors, such as kindness and respect, are rewarded, rather than focusing on punishing negative behavior. Overwhelmingly, the students expressed a preference for this approach. Students also appreciate schools' efforts to raise awareness, both of bullying behaviors to watch for and ways to report concerning behaviors to help themselves and their friends, such as Safe2Tell and trusted adults within the school.

Students were also asked what things schools could do better or differently. Students consistently expressed a desire to have a stronger voice within their schools when it comes to bullying prevention campaigns and solutions. They said they want new, creative ways for the awareness messaging to be delivered. And not only do they want to be involved in big picture strategizing in their schools, they want to make sure their peers are not just being taught awareness, but given the skills and empowerment to stand up for themselves and others.

Interestingly, the majority of the students at all three events did not know what “social-emotional learning” meant, although adults in most schools said these types of programs are being utilized. Once these programs were explained, many of the students acknowledged they are being taught social-emotional skills in school, but identified a disconnect between what adults think they are teaching and how those messages are being communicated, and how the students are receiving them.

As with the other topics discussed, the students appreciate the efforts being made, but they want to help and be a part of the solution.

*Dustin Hunter, MA. CSSRC School Outreach Consultant*

#### **4. Emergency Drills/Exercises Focus Groups:**

In the emergency drills/exercises focus groups many topics were discussed and students were asked for feedback on a variety of questions:

- What would make the emergency drills and exercises at your school better?
- When emergency drills and exercises are unannounced how does this make you feel?
- How frequently does your school conduct emergency drills and exercises? Is this too much or not enough?
- Do teachers and staff at your school take emergency drills and exercises seriously? If yes, how does this make you feel? If no, how does this make you feel?
- When emergency drills and exercises are announced beforehand, do you feel better prepared? ...less scared? ...or about the same?
- Are emergency drills and exercises realistic at your school? Are they too realistic? Or not enough?
- Does conducting emergency drills/exercises make you feel... safer? ...less safe?
- What does your parent/guardian know about, feel about emergency drills and exercises at your school?

The Center was able to collect many, many responses to these questions. The general feel of these responses leads us to believe that students want more realistic drills /exercises and they want more drills, so they can be better prepared and have a general sense of safety. They also shared that, although unannounced drills make students feel anxious and nervous, students generally agreed that they understand the necessity of conducting unannounced drills. Many students were concerned that their teachers/staff don't always take drills/exercises seriously, which leads to other students not taking drills as seriously as possible. Finally, it appears that many parents/guardians are not being kept apprised of what schools are doing to keep their youth safe, through emergency drills/exercises.

*Brad Stiles, MA. CSSRC Emergency Response Outreach Consultant*

## Plenary Session

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D., was the expert from the Cyberbullying Research Institute who presented to students and staff in Ft. Morgan and Pueblo. In his two-hour plenary session he gave a number of excellent suggestions that schools around the country are adopting to deal with cyberbullying and utilizing to create positive school climates. Here is his list:

- Purposed Pairing – older students paired with younger students so the younger students feel they have an ally in the building
- Student Advisory Boards
- Skits, Narratives and Messaging around issues of importance
- Flash Mob creations to address bullying and other topics
- Lines of Communication opened student to student and staff to students
- Natural Day (February 13<sup>th</sup>) when students dispense with makeup, etc. as they should love themselves before they profess love for others on Valentine’s Day
- Social Norming Campaigns – so students understand that “everyone ISN’T doing it” (Whatever the negative IT might be.)
- Pledge Campaigns and Honor Codes
- Public Service Announcements created by the students
- Empathy Creating Interactions
- Purposeful Acts of Kindness
- Lock it Down Day – everyone changes their passcodes on their electronic devices and vow not to share the codes with others
- Delete Day – time is set aside in school so that students (and staff) can clean up their social media profiles and any other inappropriate materials online
- Digital Citizenship Efforts
- Set electronic device standards on orientation day
- Challenge teachers to shadow a student for a day to “walk in their shoes.”
- Role play scenarios especially around issues like requests for inappropriate photos
- Be the ASKABLE adult

The CSSRC staff want to thank all the school staff who made it possible for the students to join us in these three events. We had over 300 students present in the three locations. We appreciated how mature and thoughtful the students were about these topics and they also expressed an interest in having more discussions about other topics including: alcohol, vaping and safe driving.