

# A Primer on Prevention Education in Chicago's Schools

Providing students with knowledge and skills to lead safe, healthy lives is a top priority of principals and other school leaders. In a city in which firearms claim the lives of more than 300 people annually, sexual assaults directly impact three Chicagoans each day, and rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are among the highest in the nation, schools increasingly find themselves in the position of acting as first responders in ensuring students' health and safety. In response, Communities In Schools of Chicago (CISC) provides tens of thousands of students each year with prevention education services, and has recently examined the characteristics of effective school-based prevention programming. This report reviews the prevention education needs of Chicago public school children from the perspectives of students and principals, as well as teachers, counselors and social workers. It also offers schools, service providers and concerned residents of our city and region important insights into how to best teach powerful prevention messages to children.

## Overview

Communities In Schools of Chicago is a non-profit organization that connects the city's public school students with the essential programs and services they need to succeed in school and life, but which their schools often cannot provide. From health promotion and arts enrichment, to comprehensive sex education and violence prevention, the services that CISC links to students are provided at no cost to schools or families.

Since our founding in 1988, CISC has provided essential school-based supports to almost 750,000 students citywide.

During the 2013-14 school year, CISC will work with a network of 170 community-based service providers to positively impact the lives of 70,000 children at 159 Chicago public schools.

Communities In Schools of Chicago broadly defines prevention education as programs and services that provide students a combination of knowledge and skills to make safe, pro-social

choices, while minimizing their participation in a range of potentially harmful behaviors, including consuming drugs and alcohol, engaging in high-risk sexual practices, and perpetrating violence.

## Schools Demand Prevention Services

If one wonders what the need for prevention education is among Chicago public schools, look no further than this statistic: During the 2012-2013 academic year, a full

variety of surveys and other tools in an effort to develop a deeper understanding of the prevention education services most needed by students and school communities.

Following are highlights from that data:

- During 2012-13, a third or more of CISC school partners prioritized programming in four key prevention areas (see Chart 1)

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For people concerned with giving children knowledge and skills to lead safe, healthy lives, this report offers important insights into how to best teach them powerful prevention messages.

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94 percent of schools in our citywide network identified at least one type of prevention education program as a priority for students.

In addition, CISC has collected a wealth of additional school- and community-need data through a

- During 2012-13, more CISC school partners were able to meet their prioritized needs in prevention education than in the prior year, because of connections to programs facilitated by CISC (see Chart 2)

- More schools have accessed services in several important prevention areas (see Chart 3)

A focus of CISC's work is to identify major gaps in the availability of services in high-priority areas. During the past several years, CISC has addressed the shortage of school-based services in both bullying prevention and comprehensive sex education.

With bullying prevention, CISC has nurtured partnerships with nine or more partners each of the past three years. Last school year alone, those providers reached more than 18,600 students at 69 schools. Programs ranged from classroom workshops that taught students skills to stand up to bullies to year-long interventions that helped teachers, students and parents develop a bully-free classroom culture.

In the area of comprehensive sex education, CISC identified a shortage in the number of providers able to offer in-depth education on human growth and development, safe sex practices and healthy relationships. In response, our organization partnered with eight sexual health providers in 2012-13 to ensure that 2,850 students at 23 schools received the sexual health education that school districts across the nation, including CPS, now mandate students to receive.

Despite these successes, our school network has prevention education needs that remain largely unmet. For the past two years, more than a third of our partner schools have cited conflict resolution and gang awareness as major student priorities. And while CISC has had success in cultivating partnerships in the area of comprehensive sexual health, there is still an acute need for this type of

**CHART 1**

Prevention Area	# of Schools Prioritizing
Bullying Prevention	133
Conflict Resolution	112
Comprehensive Sex Education	70
Gang Awareness	60

**CHART 2**

Number of Schools Meeting Priority Needs for Prevention Education, by Key Prevention Area

	In 2011-12	In 2012-13	Change
Bullying Prevention	41	55	+14
Conflict Resolution	8	12	+4
Comprehensive Sex Education	25	26	+1

**CHART 3**

Number of CISC Schools Accessing Services, by Key Prevention Area

	In 2011-12	In 2012-13	Change
Bullying Prevention	52	69	+17
Sexual Assault and Dating Violence Prevention	43	53	+10
Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention	2	10	+8

school-based programming as well. CISC is working to forge partnerships with providers to address these needs at no cost. Using our success in increasing the supply of programming in high-need areas like bullying

prevention and comprehensive sex education as a guide, CISC will continue to pursue opportunities that enable schools to access these important violence prevention services.

## Types of Prevention

### Education

Communities In Schools of Chicago's network of community partners provide prevention education programming in six important areas:

 Alcohol and substance abuse prevention

 Bullying prevention

 Comprehensive sex education

 Conflict resolution

 Crime and violence prevention

 Gang awareness and prevention education

## Students Voice Need for Prevention Education

A 2012 survey of almost 1,000 Chicago public school students in grades 4-9, meanwhile, revealed an acute need for additional prevention education programming in areas such as healthy decision making and violence prevention.

### Students lack key knowledge to make healthy decisions

- 36 percent do not know the effects of alcohol
- 56 percent of students did not know the health risks of marijuana

### Older students need more sexual health education to avoid risks

- 40 percent were not aware that condom use helps prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS
- 55 percent did not know that HIV causes AIDS
- 75 percent were unaware that oral sex does not prevent HIV and other STIs
- Half had important questions about sexual health that they wanted an adult to answer

### Community violence shapes students' impressions of safety and self-efficacy

- 25 percent of students reported always feeling safe in their neighborhood
- 39 percent reported always feeling safe at school
- 38 percent of students were confident that they could manage their anger when faced with an interpersonal conflict

### Bullying continues to be an issue

- 31 percent of students reported being bullied often
- 29 percent reported regularly bullying their peers

### Independent data confirm the pressing need for prevention education programs

- In 2011, Cook County had the highest rate of gonorrhea in the nation, and ranked second in the number of primary and secondary syphilis cases, as well as chlamydia

- While the Chicago Department of Public Health reports that teen pregnancies decreased significantly over the past decade, Chicago's rate in 2009 was still 46 percent higher than the comparable national figure
- In addition, the Health Department reports that in a dozen Chicago communities more than 20 percent of all births over a five-year period were to teen mothers
- According to multiple sources, more than 1,800 people were shot in Chicago each of the last three years

## The CISC Response

In the face of these serious risks to our students and communities, Communities In Schools of Chicago connects prevention education supports to thousands of students across our network each year.

- During the 2012-13 academic year 33,800 students across our network participated in at least one type of violence prevention program, compared to 29,300 in 2011-12
- Almost 22,000 students benefitted from a health education program, versus 20,000 who participated in 2011-12
- More than 18,600 children took part in a bullying prevention programming in 2012-13 and 2,500 participated in a comprehensive sex education program

Principals and other school staff attest to the impact of prevention programs. Principals surveyed in spring of 2013 reported that since their schools' partnerships with CISC began, the linkage of prevention education programming and other support

services has had major impacts on students:

- 89 percent of principals reported improved ability to resolve conflicts
- 80 percent said students' sense of safety had increased
- 78 percent said students' decision-making skills had improved
- 77 percent reported that student behavior had improved

In the same survey, 44 percent of principals indicated that the school district's new budget formula will have a significant impact on their ability to meet students' non-academic needs in 2013-14. CISC believes that more than ever, schools will turn to our organization to access a variety of essential prevention education services.

### Promoting Prevention Program Quality

Last year, tens of thousands of students at schools across the city accessed essential prevention education programs through community partners in the Communities In Schools of Chicago network. An important part of our role as connector is to ensure that these services maximize children's learning of essential knowledge and skills. To this end, in Fall 2012, CISC embarked on a year-long exploration of best practices related to school-based violence prevention programming. During the 2012-13 academic year, CISC examined a wealth of peer-reviewed research articles; interviewed experts in the fields of public health, juvenile justice, sociology and education; and participated in a range of informative seminars and trainings related to youth

My students were a part of several CISC programs that spoke about bullying from various aspects. An officer from the Cook County Sheriff's department spoke with my middle-school students and he was outstanding. His willingness to share his experience about family members who were in jail had ALL students engaged. Also, the students were able to visit the Cook County Jail through the SMART Jail Tour program. The intermediate students were able to learn about anti-bullying via Safe Humane Chicago. Finally, the primary students were able to learn about bullying from a McGruff the Crime Dog program that our teachers brought in independently to supplement CISC's connections. As a result, the entire school was able to be a part of the anti-bullying programs from agencies outside of the school.

*Paulette Williams, Johnnie Colemon Elementary Academy*



By teaching lessons about proper dog care, Safe Humane Chicago helps students build skills to treat animals and people with respect. (Photo courtesy of Safe Humane Chicago)

violence, resiliency practices and various community trends. From this work, CISC developed the *Elements of Effective Violence Prevention Programs*.

The *Elements* gauge three core areas of effective student-focused programs: (1) the soundness of their instructional methodology; (2) the rigor of their program model; and (3) the extent of their staff’s professionalism, presentation skills and cultural competency.

**Close-Up: The Elements of Effective Violence Prevention Programs**

Grounded in evidence-based best practices and research\* across a variety of related fields, including substance abuse reduction, comprehensive sex education and conflict resolution, the *Elements* will shape CISC’s work both with violence prevention partners, and with its entire field of prevention education providers.

**Area: Instruction**

- **Structured Lessons:** Violence prevention and other prevention education lessons should clearly outline the specific goals and objectives of the program session, as well as prescribe a range of student-centered activities that enable children to learn the content
- **Engaging Lessons:** Content should be delivered in a manner in which students are actively engaged in mastering each learning objective
- **Amplified Learning:** Presenters should work with teachers and other school staff, when possible, to help students build relevant prior knowledge before the program

begins, as well as extend learning of content after the program ends

**Area: Program Model**

- **Program Foundation:** Effective prevention education programs should utilize evidence-based models as well as respond to the specific needs of individual schools; programs should include assessment and evaluation components to better target the needs of students
- **Program Content:** The program content of an effective prevention program should include a variety of components that build students’ skills and knowledge, normalize pro-social behavior and help students better understand themselves and others
- **Program Delivery:** Effective prevention programs should consider the appropriate size of the audience,

reason, organizations should seek out facilitators from diverse backgrounds when making staffing decisions

- **Facilitator Skills and Knowledge:** A strong violence prevention program relies heavily on the skills and content knowledge of the facilitator
- **Professionalism:** Schools expect an appropriate standard of presenter behavior when working with students, including punctuality, timely communication and professional attire

**Applying the Elements**

During the summer of 2013, CISC conducted interviews with 17 of its violence prevention partners. The purpose of these conversations was to determine prevention providers’ alignment with our new evidence-

Elements of Effective Violence Prevention Programs		
Instruction	Program Model	Facilitator
Structured Lessons	Program Foundation	Background
Engaging Lessons	Program Content	Skills and Knowledge
Amplified Learning	Program Delivery	Professionalism

the best number of sessions to cover learning objectives, and, when possible, the inclusion of school community members such as teachers or parents, to lend credence to messaging

**Area: Facilitator**

- **Background:** Establishing strong rapport depends, in part, on students’ abilities to personally relate with a facilitator. For this

informed best practices and to gauge their need for support in incorporating those quality standards into their school-based programming. Our in-depth conversations with these partners, coupled with targeted monitoring of their programming this year, will provide CISC with a wealth of insights into school-based programming, and guide our organization in how best to support our violence prevention providers and

\*For a full list of research cited, please visit the “What We Do for Community Partners,” tab at our website: [www.cisichicago.org](http://www.cisichicago.org)

## How CISC developed the Elements

CISC staff invested significant time during the 2012-13 academic year to investigate the *Elements of Effective Violence Prevention Programs*. Our team began by identifying a set of essential questions to guide our inquiry within the areas of instructional methodology, program model, and program facilitation. These questions became the basis for interviews with select principals, student focus groups and more than a dozen experts in the fields of social work, violence prevention, public health and education. The questions also served as important filters for reviewing a variety of general interest and peer-reviewed literature in the realm of prevention and education. Following our initial fact-finding period, our team synthesized its findings and developed the *Elements of Effective Violence Prevention Programs*.

other partners in the prevention field. In addition to utilizing the *Elements* to monitor the quality of our violence prevention partners this year, CISC will leverage the standards to support all of our community partners.

Throughout the school year, CISC's Community Partnership Team will infuse learnings about rigorous instruction and strong facilitation practices into its NAVIGATE training series for all community partners. Further, our Learning Allies

initiative has enabled representatives from community partner organizations in the areas of prevention, health promotion, enrichment and youth development to discuss best practices for educating Chicago students. Finally, three times this year, our organization will host a workshop specifically designed for violence prevention partners to discuss strategies for incorporating the *Elements* into their school-based programming.

Moving forward, CISC will adapt the process it used in developing the *Elements of Effective Violence Prevention Programs* to build its organizational knowledge of effective practices in other content areas prioritized by schools. Like the *Elements of Effective Violence Prevention Programs*, these standards will enable CISC to better monitor the quality of specialized programming it connects to schools, identify partners that need support in enhancing the rigor of their programs, and, overall, enable our organization to connect more programs that have a positive impact on the lives of young people.

## Conclusion

Schools are at the forefront of promoting the academic success and the health, wellness and safety of our city's children. Consistently, students, teachers, principals and other school leaders have indicated the importance of providing children with both the knowledge and skills they need to make safe, life-affirming decisions inside and outside of the classroom. Communities In Schools of Chicago has long played an important role in ensuring that tens of thousands of children across the city access these essential supports each year. Today it is also our responsibility to ensure that

these programs and services maximize their impact on students' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors.

"Communities In Schools of Chicago has a strong track record of responding to the prevention education needs of our school partners," notes Jane Mentzinger, CISC's executive director. "As we learn more about what makes a school-based prevention program work well, sharing that knowledge with our partners in areas like substance abuse reduction, comprehensive sex education and violence prevention will be a big part of our work this year and beyond."

Organizations interested in working with or supporting Communities In Schools of Chicago in this effort are welcomed to contact the organization and join the discussion.

## Acknowledgements

Communities In Schools of Chicago extends its appreciation to the many people that contributed to the development of this report. We especially would like to thank the following researchers, policy experts and public school educators for taking time to meet with CISC and share their insights into what makes a quality school-based violence prevention program:

- Colleen Cicchetti, Assistant Professor in Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine
- Freshmen and senior students at Chicago Talent Development High School, a Chicago Public School
- Samina Hadi-Tabassum, Associate Professor of Education, Dominican University

## Profile of an Effective Prevention Partner: Imagination Theater

One prevention education partner whose services are in high demand each year among Chicago Public Schools is Imagination Theater. During the 2012-13 academic year the organization taught more than 8,500 students in 22 schools important lessons about healthy decision-making and ways to avoid becoming victims of sexual violence.

CISC has long received positive feedback from schools about the impact of the *No Secrets* program on students. Principals praise the program for its innovative use of theater techniques to help students talk openly about sensitive subjects like sexual assault. Guidance counselors and social workers value the training and follow-up services that Imagination Theater and its partners, the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center and Rape Victim Advocates, provide to students who disclose personal accounts of abuse.



Steve Leaver of Imagination Theater leads a CISC workshop on classroom management.

An interview that CISC conducted with the organization this summer confirmed the impressions of our school partners that Imagination Theater is at the forefront of providing quality school-based programming. The agency was found to be high performing across all key indicators of quality programming listed on page 5. Particular strengths were Imagination Theater's in-depth procedures for preparing school staff to support students in participating in *No Secrets*. It also received top marks for providing extensive training to its program staff.

"The *No Secrets* program has powerful lessons to teach students, but that can only happen if the program is delivered effectively," said Imagination Theater's artistic director Steve Leaver. "By tapping into our own organizational abilities, and partnering with an organization like CISC, we're able to develop the competencies we need in areas like our program content and facilitation to help keep Chicago students safe."

- Libia Gil, Assistant Deputy Secretary and Director, Office of English Language Acquisition, U.S. Department of Education (interviewed while in her previous role as Vice President for Practice at the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning in Chicago)
- Shirrie Jackson, Principal, Ludwig Van Beethoven Public Elementary School, a Chicago Public School
- Dr. Kimberley Joseph, Division Chair in Trauma ICU/Prevention, John H. Stroger Hospital of Cook County
- Jorge Matos, Assistant Director, and Jenna Musselman-Palles, Program Director, ALSO-Chicago
- Mark Mattaini, Associate Professor of Social Work, Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago
- Dr. Doriane Miller, Associate Professor of Medicine and Director of the Center for Community Health and Vitality, University of Chicago Medicine
- Maury Nation, Associate Professor, College of Education and Human Development, Vanderbilt University
- Ninth-grade students from Gage Park High School, a Chicago Public School
- Ninth-grade students from John Hope College Preparatory High School, a Chicago Public School
- Pamela Randall, Director for Practice, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning in Chicago

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(continued from page 7)

- Erin Roche, Principal, William H. Prescott Public Elementary School, a Chicago Public School
- Aimee Schneider, Project Manager, Chicago Bullying Prevention Initiative, a project of Hazelden Publishing
- Mashana Smith, Pediatric Psychologist, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago
- Joseph Strickland, Research Associate, Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago
- Phillip Thomas, President and Chief Executive Officer, eta Creative Arts Foundation
- Ilana Zafran, Program Director, UMOJA Student Development Corporation

We also commend each of our school partners and prevention education partners that collaborate with CISC each year to ensure students develop the knowledge and skills they need to lead safe, healthy lives.

This report is the third in a series of publications by CISC that explores important topics in local education. The first report, *Understanding Violence Prevention in Chicago's Schools*, was released in May 2011. The second report, *The Mental Health Supports Gap for CPS Students*, was announced in April 2012. Findings from these reports direct the organization's work in important ways and can help others recognize the particular challenges facing schools, administrators and students. All reports in the series can

be accessed via the "News and Media" tab at [www.cischicago.org](http://www.cischicago.org).

Our organization is a proud affiliate of the Communities In Schools national network. Communities In Schools addresses America's chronic dropout problem by surrounding students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.

Working in 2,400 schools and community-based sites in the most challenged communities in 27 states and the District of Columbia, Communities In Schools serves 1.25 million students and their families every year. Communities In Schools is the largest and most effective dropout prevention organization, and the only one proven to both decrease dropout rates and increase graduation rates. An economic modeling study revealed that for every dollar invested in Communities In Schools, \$11.60 is returned to society.

More information about Communities In Schools of Chicago can be found at [www.cischicago.org](http://www.cischicago.org).



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If you would like to learn more about what Communities In Schools of Chicago is doing to support prevention education programming in schools, please call 312.829.2475, ext. 16.

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