Sustaining and Expanding Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiatives

Part of the SS/HS Framework Implementation Toolkit		
1. Plan	2. Implement	3. Sustain & Expand

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Sustainability & Expansion Guide

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Way

History of the Initiative

In 1999, the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice embarked on a unique and unprecedented collaboration, creating the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) initiative in response to rising concerns about school safety, youth violence, and substance abuse. The designers of the original federal grant program recognized that violence among young people is caused by many factors, including early childhood experiences, family life, mental health, and substance use. No single action can be counted on to prevent it. Therefore, the three federal agencies worked together, pooled their resources, and established a program that funds communities across the country to implement a comprehensive approach to school safety improvement, mental health promotion, and youth violence prevention. To date, more than 13 million students in almost 400 communities from all 50 states have benefited from an SS/HS initiative.

In each of these communities, agencies and organizations from education, law enforcement, juvenile justice, and mental health came together to address these underlying causes of youth violence. Over the years, these collaborations have achieved some dramatic results. A comprehensive evaluation of some of the initial SS/HS communities reported that more than 90% of school staff saw a reduction of violence on school grounds, and nearly 80% said that SS/HS had reduced violence in their communities.

The SS/HS Framework

With continued support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) over the past decade and a half, the SS/HS approach has been refined, expanded, and improved. The collective experience of SS/HS communities is best represented by the SS/HS Framework, a simple delta that captures the essence of the SS/HS way. As a delta represents change, the SS/HS Framework represents an approach to school safety, mental health promotion, and youth violence prevention that creates the conditions for change in your community. If the iconic schoolhouse that serves as the logo of the SS/HS initiative represents *where* we do our work, then the delta of the SS/HS framework represents *how* we do it.

The SS/HS Framework is made up of three parts—elements, strategic approaches, and guiding principles. The following **elements** are the essential goals of an SS/HS initiative—what we are trying to accomplish:

1. Promoting early childhood social and emotional learning and development
2. Promoting mental, emotional, and behavioral health
3. Connecting families, schools, and communities
4. Preventing behavioral health problems
5. Creating safe and violence-free schools

The following **strategic approaches** provide the ways or methods for our agencies and organizations to work together, as partners, to accomplish the work of an SS/HS initiative:

- Collaboration and partnerships

- Technology
- Policy change and development
- Capacity building
- Systemic change and integration

The following **guiding principles** permeate the elements and approaches. Like values, they guide the work on an SS/HS initiative:

- Cultural and linguistic competency
- Serving vulnerable and at-risk populations
- Developmentally appropriate
- Resource leveraging
- Sustainability
- Youth guided and family driven
- Evidence-based interventions

The Crux of It All: Partnerships

An SS/HS initiative works only when a community comes together. The SS/HS Framework helps create the conditions for change, but *collaboration with partners* makes change happen. Many SS/HS communities report that, in addition to making their schools safer and their students healthier, the most important outcome of their SS/HS initiative has been the partnerships. When a school system joins forces with mental health providers and then gets child welfare, juvenile justice, and law enforcement on board, remarkable things happen. When faith communities, businesses, and civic organizations join the movement, the remarkable becomes the substantial. And when families and youth join the initiative, the substantial becomes stellar. Most SS/HS communities will tell you that an SS/HS initiative works best when families and youth are included in all aspects of the initiative. They express the diversity of voices within the community. They inform and improve the planning and delivery of programs and services. And they ultimately become our biggest advocates.

The SS/HS Framework Implementation Toolkit

This **Sustainability & Expansion Guide** is part of a comprehensive toolkit designed to help you use the SS/HS Framework in your community. The Framework Implementation Toolkit, or Toolkit, is divided into three sections that are defined by the phase of the initiative—planning, implementation, and sustainability and expansion. For each phase, we provide you with a how-to guide like this one, as well as the workbooks, worksheets, and online training courses that were developed for the SS/HS communities. Because most of the resources in the Safe Schools Framework Implementation Toolkit were developed for the communities funded by the SS/HS grant program, they are often in-depth, detailed, and structured around mandatory requirements of the grant program. We ask you to keep this in mind as you use these supplemental resources because, at times, they may feel overwhelming. But we recommend that you use what you can and leave the rest for others to use.

Who Should Use This Toolkit

This Toolkit has been developed for the leaders and staff of local educational agencies—a city, county, or regional school system or a single school or cluster of schools. As the name implies, Safe Schools is about creating safer environments where students can learn and excel. But if the school or school system is the hub, then the community is its spokes and rim, to make the wheel turn. As noted, an SS/HS initiative succeeds only when a community works together. Therefore, this Toolkit is designed to be accessible to the leaders and staff members of partner agencies who can also lead an SS/HS initiative. The many community leaders, staff members, federal employees, policy makers, and families and youth that make up the SS/HS community wish you well in this most important work.

Sustainability and Expansion of an SS/HS Initiative

Planning and then implementing an SS/HS initiative in your community is challenging and rewarding work. In time, you and your community will begin to see the benefits, as the programs and services begin to make a difference in the lives of the youth and families in your community. However, the work does not stop here. For your collaborative to have a lasting and deep impact in your community or across your state, it is important to ensure that your efforts are sustainable and expandable. This guide, and the other resources included in this section of the Toolkit, will help your community collaborative move from implementation to sustainability and, in time, expansion.

After offering working definitions of sustainability and expansion below, we provide an overview of the other resources that are available as part of the Sustainability & Expansion Guide. These additional resources will help you plan and implement sustainability and expansion strategies at the school and community level, and most importantly, at the state level, where ongoing funding flows.

Definition of Sustainability

In the context of an SS/HS initiative, sustainability refers to the ability of an initiative to carry on activities after the planning and implementation phases. To achieve sustainability, SS/HS communities have found it helpful to use various strategies to maintain the positive outcomes obtained through initial activities. For example, a successful sustainability strategy would be when a local school or school board agrees to own and support a universal program that has been shown to increase student engagement because it is tied to improved student attendance. This outcome is highly valued by schools and linked to important funding gains for the local education agency, which gives the universal program "staying power" for future school years.

Planning is an important part of sustainability and should be done with an eye toward sustaining activities, services, and programs. Effective strategies that lead to sustainability also include policy changes, shifts in cultural norms, and changes to practice that will support future programming. The goal of your sustainability work is to develop partnerships and creative funding strategies to support all successful components of your SS/HS initiative.

Over the years, SS/HS communities have found that four key components are essential to sustaining an Initiative:

- Strong leadership
- Adaptability to community needs
- Effective collaborations
- Meaningful evaluations

Overview of the Resources in this Phase

Moving From Sustainability to Expansion

How and what you sustain and expand will depend on how you have planned and implemented your SS/HS initiative using the Framework. Some community collaboratives have focused on an SS/HS initiative in a single school or group of schools. In this case, you will likely be working with your local education agency (LEA), such as a city or county school system, to sustain and expand your SS/HS initiative. If this is your situation, then you should consider using the Strategies to Sustain and Expand School Mental Health Services at the Local/Community Level, a quick reference guide that brings together the shared experience of funded SS/HS programs that were working at the local level.

Other community collaboratives will have started at the multi-campus, or perhaps even multi-LEA level, and are looking to take their work state-wide. In this case, you will likely be working with their state education

agency (SEA) to sustain and expand your SS/HS initiative. If this is your situation, then you should consider using the Strategies to Sustain and Expand School Mental Health Services at the State Level, a quick reference guide that brings together the shared experience of funded SS/HS programs that were working at both the state and local levels—primarily the cohort of states funded in 2013.

In all cases, regardless of your focus for sustaining and expanding your SS/HS work, you should consider using the additional resources in this phase of the Toolkit.

Learning From Peers: How Communities and States Addressed the Elements of SS/HS

This summary of successful work describes how the states and their laboratory communities addressed each of the SS/HS elements. The Learning From Peers: SS/HS Successes collection provides practical, "real-world' guidance from communities that worked for at least 5 years to plan, implement, and sustain SS/HS initiatives. We also invite you to listen to the SS/HS Project Directors' podcast, where they discuss their Thoughts on Leadership as they led their state-level SS/HS initiative.

Aligning SS/HS Initiatives With Other Federal and National Programs

The other resource that your community collaborative may find useful as you think about sustaining and expanding your SS/HS initiative at either the local or state level is the Aligning and Integrating Your Prevention Programs and Initiatives Guide. This guide shares learnings from the 2013 cohort of SS/HS grantees, who have worked at both the state and local/community level, about how they worked to align and integrate complementary initiatives into their SS/HS initiative. The success stories in this workbook illustrate how they aligned and integrated their efforts with other federal and national programs to achieve more effective coordination, increased sustainability, and, in some cases, expansion of their programs and services.

Resources

Podcast	Guide	Success Stories
	 Aligning Your Prevention Programs and Initiatives Workbook	

Quick Reference Guides

Quick Reference Guide: Strategies to Sustain and Expand School Mental Health Services at the Local/Community Level

Part of the SS/HS Framework Implementation Toolkit				
1. Plan		2. Implement		3. Sustain & Expand
Collaboration & Partnerships	Technology	Policy Change	Capacity Building	Systemic Change & Integration

Strategies to Sustain and Expand School Mental Health Services at the State Level

Part of the SS/HS Framework Implementation Toolkit				
1. Plan		2. Implement		3. Sustain & Expand
Collaboration & Partnerships	Technology	Policy Change	Capacity Building	**Systemic Change & Integration**

Next Steps

This guide, and the other guides and resources in the Safe Schools Framework Implementation Toolkit, represent the experience and lessons learned of the coordinators and managers of the SS/HS communities as well as the federal staff and technical assistance providers who worked closely with them. We trust that you, as the coordinator of your community's prevention initiative, will take advantage of the collective wisdom represented in this resource so you and your community can plan, implement, and sustain an initiative that supports schools and communities in creating safe, healthy, and productive schools where students can learn and grow into healthy and contributing adults.

We invite you to review and use the other guides that introduce you to the phases in this Toolkit:

- Planning an SS/HS Initiative in Your School and Community
- Implementing an SS/HS Initiative in Your School and Community
- Coordinator's Guide for Managing an SS/HS Initiative

Each guide includes examples and recommendations. We also feature additional resources—including checklists and online training modules—on the Safe Schools Framework Implementation Toolkit website.