Implementing a Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative in Your School and Community

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

Table of Contents

Implementation 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 youth violence, substance abuse, and school safety. The designers of the original federal grant program recognized that violence among young people is caused by a multitude of factors, including early childhood experiences, family life, mental health, and substance use issues. 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 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 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 our 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 get 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 Implementation Guide is part of a comprehensive toolkit designed to help you implement the SS/HS Framework in your community. The Framework Implementation Toolkit, or Toolkit, is divided into three sections, 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 many workbooks, worksheets, and online training courses that were developed for the SS/HS communities. Because most of the resources in this 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 rims 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.

I. Implementing the Comprehensive Plan

As we noted in the *Planning an SS/HS Initiative in Your School and Community* Guide, an SS/HS initiative begins with a plan. We hope that you and your community collaborative have had an opportunity to develop a comprehensive plan, taking advantage of some of the resources offered as part of this SS/HS Framework Implementation Toolkit. As you begin to implement your comprehensive plan, we trust that you will also find the following activities and resources helpful. Not all the recommended activities and resources in this guide will be relevant to your planned work. Therefore, do not feel compelled to use them all. Pursue the activities and use the relevant resources that make sense for your community. Others will no doubt find a use for the other resources.

## Preparing to Implement Evidence-Based Programs in School Settings

As part of your planning process, we hope your community collaborative has identified a group of interrelated evidence-based programs (EBPs) or interventions to help you promote mental health and address youth violence in your community. After considering the important factors outlined in the Planning Guide, you will need to put the plan into action. This activity typically involves the following steps:

- Creating an implementation plan and team, including defining partner roles
- Building staff and organizational competencies, including identifying champions and communicating with stakeholders
- Developing a fidelity plan for each of your selected EBPs so that as they are being implemented, your leadership can check to determine that your staff is implementing each step of the programs in the same manner that the original research study was conducted
- Scheduling implementation activities, including determining data collection and planning for sustainability and expansion

We have a full suite of resources to help you with this activity. We recommend that you begin with the second module of the Evidence-Based Module Series, a three-part module online training series introduced in the Planning Guide and featured below. We introduced you and your team to the *Selecting EBPs* workbook in the Planning Guide, but it now may be helpful to go back and review several of the relevant chapters and appendices. Finally, the Selecting EBPs checklist is intended as a quick reference tool to help keep you on track as you turn your knowledge into practice. Click on the images below to access these resources.
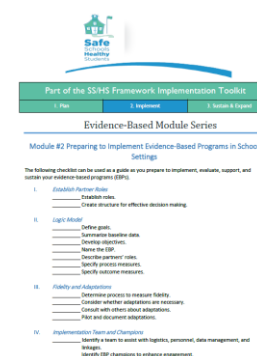
Resources

Online Training
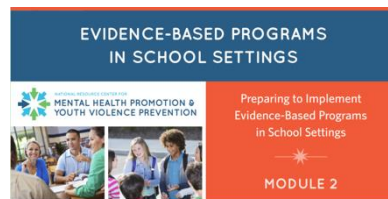
Workbook
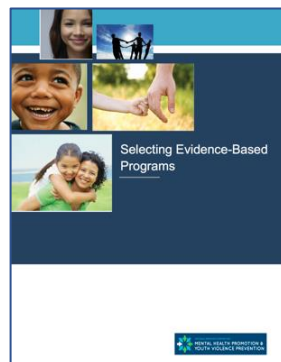
Checklist

II. Preparing and Implementing a Comprehensive School Mental Health Program

As part of your planning process, your community collaborative may have identified a comprehensive school mental health program as part of your planned initiative. By "comprehensive school mental health program," we mean a school–community partnership that provides a continuum of mental health services to support students, families, and the school community. If you are planning to implement this type of program, it will be helpful to follow a step-by-step approach, which typically involves the following activities:

- Engage staff, youth, families, and a community mental health partner, including developing a school–community advisory group.

- Map programs, review needs, and plan service delivery.

- Ensure confidentiality and privacy by preparing to meet all applicable requirements, including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act requirements.

- Promote the program, collect data, and communicate success.

- Explore national, state, and local funding opportunities and diverse sources such as grants, contracts, fee-for-service payments, and insurance to sustain and expand the program.

By moving through each of these activities, your team will create a comprehensive school mental health program that provides the following services:

- Evidence-based universal prevention that fosters inclusive, nurturing climates and promotes wellness.

- Training for school and community members to respond appropriately to young people, support their wellness, and identify and respond to early warning signs of mental health difficulties.

- Targeted prevention and intervention programs and services that support mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being of children, youth, and young adults.

- Specific, appropriate mental/behavioral health services/supports that address their emotional and behavioral difficulties.

We recommend that you review Modules 2 and 3 of the Mental Health Module Series, part of the three-module online training series available through the SS/HS Framework Implementation Toolkit and featured below.

Resources

Online Training: Module 2
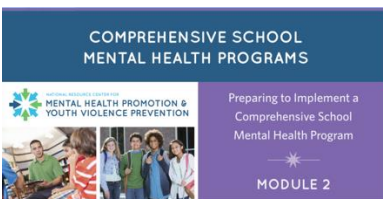
Online Training: Module 3

III. Engaging Youth and Families in Your SS/HS Initiative

The SS/HS community has long recognized the importance of youth and family involvement in the work of a community collaborative focused on mental health promotion and youth violence prevention. In fact, it is one of

the guiding principles of the SS/HS Framework: "youth guided and family driven." Young people, parents, and caregivers can offer valuable insights to help your initiative understand how best to engage youth and families in your efforts. Just as businesses and program designers often turn to "subject matter experts" to help them develop or improve a product or service, we recommend that your SS/HS initiative seek out the subject matter experts in youth and families—that is, the youth and families themselves—to help support the success of your efforts.

Engaging Youth

Actively seeking out and engaging the know-how of a diverse range of students can help you tailor programs, methods, and messages to the population of focus or subpopulations in your schools and community. But engaging youth in this work requires mutual respect and cultural and linguistic competence. By competence, we do not just mean being sensitive to and inclusive of different ethnicities and language groups in your communities; it also involves being inclusive of different genders, age groups, and even identity-based or affinity groups such as, for example, mainstream, popular, alternative, hip-hop, and so on. A diverse group of youth representatives from your community can provide your team with insights about what works in promoting positive mental health among youth, what does not work so well, and why.

Students engaged in this type of partnership tend to bring creativity, enthusiasm, and energy to an SS/HS initiative, helping to "keep it real." Because it is their lives and the lives of their peers that are affected, students have a vested interest in making it work. As many of us have learned over the 15+ years of the SS/HS program, the value of inviting and empowering students to play key roles in an SS/HS initiative is immeasurable.

Engaging Families

Decades of research have affirmed that students, both young and old, benefit greatly when their families are actively engaged in their education. For example, after analyzing 85 studies, Henderson and Berla concluded that the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is the family's ability to do three things:

- Create a home environment that encourages learning.
- Express high expectations for their children's achievement and future careers.
- Be involved in their children's education both at school and in the community.

Like youth, a family's stake in creating and maintaining safe and healthy schools is primary and enduring: They are "in it for the long run." In addition, parents and caregivers are often willing and excellent spokespeople to help your community collaborative inform and educate decision makers and policy makers about the value of investing in mental health promotion and youth violence prevention. Once engaged, parents and caregivers will offer practical, relevant, and often energetic input and feedback on the work of your initiative. The key question, therefore, is not whether to engage families, but how to do so effectively.

Principles for Successful Family Engagement

As mentioned, one of guiding principles is, in part, "family driven"—that is, families have a primary role in making decisions about the care of their own children as well as the rules and policies that affect them. For an SS/HS initiative, embracing this principle means including family members as equal partners in your community collaborative. Putting this principle into practice means working together with the families using research-based programs at home and in school to support their own children's learning and development. At the system level, adopting this principle means welcoming and supporting parents and caregivers to cocreate plans and policies, evaluate programs and services, and inform and generate necessary support for system improvements.
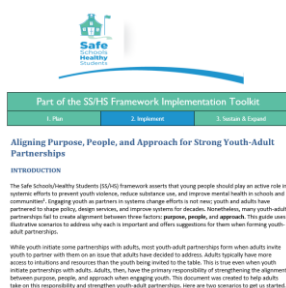
Resources

This SS/HS Framework Implementation Toolkit includes three resources to help your community collaborative embrace the youth-guided and family-driven principle of the SS/HS Framework:

- *Aligning Purpose, People, and Approach for Strong Youth-Adult Partnerships in SS/HS Work* is informed by the diverse experience of communities engaging youth in in systems change initiatives as well as by many conversations with both educators and students involved in the SS/HS program.

- *Creating Conditions for Meaningful Family Engagement from Pre-K Through High School* is designed to help you develop a family engagement approach and practice from Pre-K through high school. It provides an overview of key parent and family engagement policies that identifies significant regulatory requirements and expectations to support family engagement efforts of schools and school districts. It also highlights specific programs that show the positive difference that engaged families make. And it provides ideas and recommendations about "what works" in engaging families.

- *Resource Guide to Building Family-Driven Partnerships With Schools* is a guide originally created to support communities funded by the federal SS/HS program to develop meaningful partnerships with families in their communities. Organized by the five elements of the SS/HS Framework, the guide features descriptions of roles for family members in education systems from early childhood through college; provides examples of how juvenile justice, mental health, and child welfare agencies have implemented family-driven approaches that have yielded more culturally responsive and effective service delivery systems; and shows how family-run community-based organizations can help to support family–school partnerships. It also includes a rich catalogue of additional reference materials for deeper exploration.

You can access these resources by clicking on the images below.

Youth Guide

Family Guide

Resource Guide

IV. Measuring Success: Developing an Evaluation Plan

Developing and implementing an evaluation plan will ensure that you have the data you need to document, demonstrate, and communicate the success of your programs and services. The essential data that come from your evaluation will help you monitor the implementation and the outcomes of these programs and services. Developing this plan *prior to* implementing a new program or service will ensure that you are well-prepared to monitor its implementation, undertake quality improvements, and make critical data-driven decisions about costs and staffing, an often challenging but essential part of managing the always-limited resources of your schools and community.

To develop an evaluation plan, you will need your theory of change (TOC) and logic model, developed as part of your planning process and covered in more detail in the [Planning Guide](). The TOC and logic model outline the "big picture" of your initiative, articulating specific goals and objectives. If you have not had a chance to develop a TOC and logic model, we highly recommend that you do so before implementing any program or service or developing an evaluation plan. In addition to the Planning Guide, we feature several helpful resources at the end of this section to help you develop these two essential components of your comprehensive plan.

Based on the experience of the SS/HS communities, we know that developing a comprehensive evaluation plan will typically involve the following activities:

1. **Develop an evaluation narrative** that describes the evaluation process, how data will be continuously used for quality improvement, and outlines data collection links to the logic model goals and objectives.
2. **Identify process questions** that will help you answer how your program is being implemented. This should include a plan for monitoring intervention fidelity and other interim goals that will help you interpret long-term outcomes data toward the end of the program.
3. **Identify outcome questions** to help answer whether changes have occurred for the people participating in the program.
4. **Determine report formats and channels** to help you communicate the data.
5. **Outline staffing and timelines for all data collection** to keep everyone involved on task.
6. **Consider and take measures to protect human subjects** when applicable.

The evaluators of SS/HS communities consistently report that the key to successfully developing and executing an evaluation plan is to include *all stakeholders*—including students, families, school staff, and administrators—from the very beginning. By doing so, you will develop a more effective and comprehensive plan that has been developed and will be supported by the entire community. They become stakeholders—participants who have a stake in your success.

If you would like to hear more tips from SS/HS evaluators about developing a participatory, comprehensive evaluation plan, including tips for on how to develop "traffic light reports," make sure to listen to the SS/HS Evaluator podcast featured in the Resources at the end of this section.

Evaluation as a Progressive Activity

The SS/HS evaluators also recognized that evaluation of an initiative such as SS/HS is a progressive activity, focusing on different priorities depending on where you are in the lifecycle of your initiative. In early implementation, your evaluation will likely need to focus on collecting structural and process measures to document how the initiative is starting off. "Process measures" can include measuring *structural* components that will be necessary for full implementation—for example, how many collaborating systems are committed to a common vision; how many staff are being trained in a selected EBP or practice; or identifying the initial training outcomes such as satisfaction, knowledge, and practice gains.

As your efforts move from early implementation to full implementation, you will likely need to start looking at fidelity measures, that is, determining if participating providers—for example, school counselors, children's mental health clinicians, or classroom teachers—have adopted the new practices of the program or service as a result of training or other professional development activities provided by your initiative. Later, when you have fully implemented your programs and services, your evaluation activities will shift toward measuring outcomes such as improvements in student attendance or academic achievement or reduction in disciplinary referrals.

Thinking of evaluation as a progression helps to anticipate needs and focus, but the design of your initiative—the TOC and logic model—will determine what you do when. Even in early implementation, for

example, you may test your TOC by measuring the actual experience (outcomes) for the students and teachers involved in the pilot testing of specific programs or services.

We have developed a number of excellent resources to help you develop a comprehensive evaluation plan. Click on the images listed below to access these resources.

Resources

Podcast

Online Training


Online Training

V. Strategic Communication Planning for Success and Sustainability

SS/HS communities learned that communication with key stakeholders is critical to the short-term success and long-term sustainability of your work. Engaging these stakeholders at the beginning and throughout your initiative will help ensure that they become and remain partners in prevention and systems change, now and well into the future. We recommend that you develop a communication plan as part of the planning process, so your initiative will not be "the best-kept secret in town" after years of hard work. There are two important things to keep in mind when planning your communication efforts:

- **There is no "one size fits all" when it comes to communication**. A single brochure or a press release for all audiences will not move any of them to action. Therefore, plan to focus your communication efforts to strategic, selected audiences.

- **Communicate early, communicate often**. SS/HS communities learned that the longer you wait to engage these strategic audiences, the less likely it is that you will be able to sustain and expand the initiative. You need these audiences on board as soon as possible and throughout your initiatives.

When working with SS/HS communities, we encouraged them to think and act "like a social marketer"—that is, use audience research and insights to drive your strategy to help achieve behavior change. As we discussed in the Planning Guide, effective communication and social marketing begin with planning. To support the SS/HS communities, we developed several resources to support a strategic approach to effective communication, including the eight-step planning model shown below. Used as an outline for the resources and introduced in the Planning Guide (also listed below), this model can help your community collaborative work through developing and implementing a communication plan.
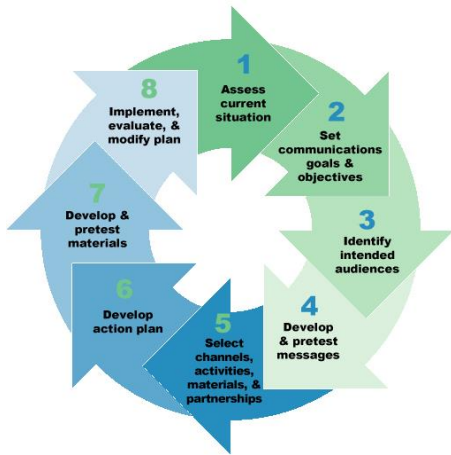
We hope you have had an opportunity to do so during your planning work. If not, it is not too late. We recommend that you work with your collaborative to determine the most important communication challenges and opportunities ahead of you as you implement your SS/HS initiative and then develop a plan that will help you address and overcome, or capitalize, on these challenges and opportunities. For initiatives that are about collaboration and partnerships, communication is key to both program success and initiative sustainability and expandability down the road.

We recommend reviewing the workbook that we introduced in the Planning Guide. It might also be helpful to take Modules 2 and 3 of the Communication Module Series, a continuation of the three-part module online training series introduced in the Planning Guide. Finally, we have developed a customizable infographic template that can help you to communicate key data to priority audiences. This infographic builder is available for download as a PPT file.

Resources

Workbook

Online Training: Module 2

Online Training: Module 3

Infographic

VI. Next Steps

This guide, and the other guides and resources in the SS/HS 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. We trust that you, as the coordinator of an SS/HS 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 in this Toolkit:

- Planning a SS/HS Initiative in Your School and Community
- Sustaining & Expanding a SS/HS Initiative in Your School and Community with Support from the State
- Coordinator's Guide for Managing a SS/HS Initiative

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