



Comprehensive School-Based Prevention

Lessons Learned from DELTA FOCUS

February 2025

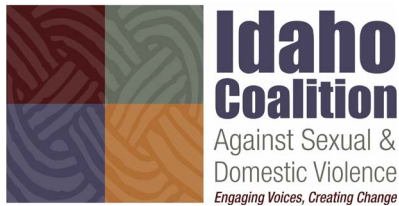
preventIPV
tools for social change



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Contributing Organizations



Idaho Coalition Against Sexual
& Domestic Violence
idvsa.org



Indiana Coalition Against
Domestic Violence
icadvinc.org



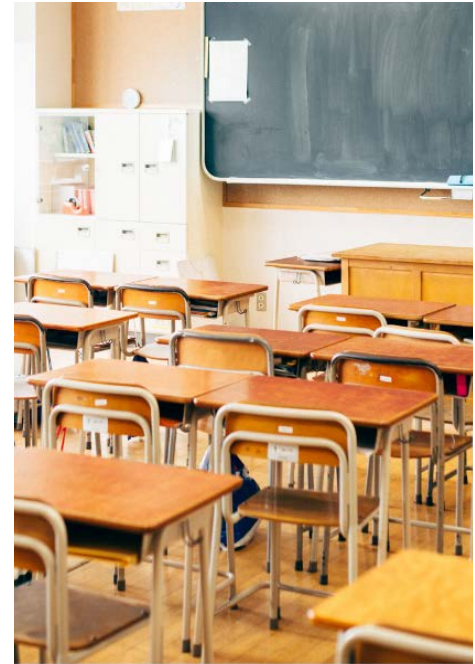
North Carolina Coalition Against
Domestic Violence
nccadv.org

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Overview

In recent years, there has been a growing call¹ to identify programs that can prevent more people from ever experiencing violence. To date, this knowledge gap remains given only a limited number of intimate partner violence (IPV) prevention strategies have been rigorously evaluated for their impact in communities (e.g., neighborhoods, cities, and states) and community settings (e.g., hospitals, schools, businesses). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancement and Leadership Through Alliances, Focusing on Outcomes for Communities United with States (DELTA FOCUS) program² attempted to fill this knowledge gap by documenting the efforts of domestic violence coalitions to prevent IPV through influencing the environments and conditions in which people live, work, and play. These DELTA FOCUS lessons learned are intended to be shared with other domestic violence coalitions and those whose work intersects with preventing IPV.



The DELTA FOCUS program supported domestic violence coalitions to identify, implement, and evaluate programs that are theoretically or empirically linked to reducing IPV, or decreasing risk factors or increasing protective factors for IPV.³ Consequently, the coalitions learned important lessons along the way. Some lessons are specific to one type of approach while some are more broadly applicable for implementing and evaluating community-based approaches. The goal of sharing these stories is for others in the violence prevention field to benefit from this collective learning. This includes learning more about existing field-based programs and practices, discovering what worked or did not work in implementation, and considering how to approach evaluation or develop a more rigorous evaluation than was possible for the DELTA FOCUS domestic violence coalitions.

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Division of Violence Prevention Strategic Vision. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/strategicvision.html>. Accessibility verified June 26, 2018.
- 2 CDC-RFA-CE13-1302. DELTA FOCUS (Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancement and Leadership Through Alliances, Focusing on Outcomes for Communities United with States). Department of Health and Human Services. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: www.grants.gov/web/grants/viewopportunity.html?oppld=198393. Accessed October 22, 2018.
- 3 Armstead, T.L., Rambo, K., Kearns, M., Jones, K.M., Dills, J., & Brown, P. (2017). CDC's DELTA FOCUS Program: identifying promising primary prevention strategies for intimate partner violence. *Journal of Women's Health*, 26(1), 9-12.



Introduction

Comprehensive prevention strategies – targeting multiple risk and protective factors and multiple layers of the social ecology – are effective at preventing violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV) and teen dating violence (TDV).^{4,5} Schools are natural places to implement such strategies since youth spend so much time in that setting. Furthermore, comprehensive, multi-level strategies may provide a greater opportunity to reach the entire school community and address the social and structural conditions contributing to violence-related inequities among certain groups.⁶ However, several important factors – including the school’s readiness to participate, strategies to encourage engagement and sustainability, and how the approaches can support and add value to the school’s needs and priorities – must be considered before and during implementation.⁷ The prevention approaches highlighted in this story provide examples of school-based prevention efforts that include multiple approaches to more comprehensively address risk and protective factors for dating violence among all youth in a school setting. In this story, three community coalitions in Idaho, Indiana, and North Carolina sought to create protective, positive school environments by implementing comprehensive school-based prevention related to safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments, gender equitable policies and programs, and school climate norms and beliefs.

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- 4 Niolon, P.H., Kearns, M., Dills, J., Rambo, K., Irving, S., Armstead, T., & Gilbert, L. (2017). *Preventing intimate partner violence across the lifespan: A technical package of programs, policies, and practices*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
 - 5 Niolon, P. H., Vivolo-Kantor, A. M., Tracy, A. J., Latzman, N. E., Little, T. D., DeGue, S., ... & Tharp, A. T. (2019). An RCT of dating matters: Effects on teen dating violence and relationship behaviors. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 57(1), 13-23.
 - 6 Trickett, E. J., & Beehler, S. (2013). The ecology of multilevel interventions to reduce social inequalities in health. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(8), 1227-1246.
 - 7 Edwards, K. M., Orchowski, L. M., Espelage, D. L., & Temple, J. R. (2022). What is not in the methods section: challenges, successes, and lessons learned from conducting school-based interpersonal violence prevention research. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 08862605221109881.

Table 1. DELTA FOCUS Comprehensive School-Based Approaches

Coalition	Approach and Goal	Example Activities
Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence’s Ada County Community Coalition	School-Based Gender Equity: This approach sought to create environments that promote gender equity in and around schools through the implementation of a model school policy and related programming, as well as coordinated gender equity messaging and prevention efforts with families and community-based organizations that served the neighborhood where students reside.	Utilizing data from school climate surveys, the community coalition worked with staff at the focus school to implement a social norms campaign aimed at supporting healthy social constructs of gender. A toolkit on positive communication and conflict resolution skills was distributed to parents and caregivers in the neighborhood served by the school.
Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence’s Hands of Hope Community Coalition	Mississinewa Schools: This comprehensive approach involved multiple programs aimed at instilling the safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments (SSNREs) philosophy throughout all grade levels in Grant County schools to increase school connectedness and enhance respectful behaviors among students and faculty, with the ultimate goal of reducing IPV and TDV among school students and alumni.	The approach involved working closely with partners within the Mississinewa Community Schools Corporation to maintain, monitor, and evaluate prevention programs (e.g., the Peaceful Bus Program and Natural Helpers) throughout the school district.
North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence’s New Hanover Community Coalition	School Climate Approach: This approach involved engaging two middle schools to implement the Shifting Boundaries curriculum to change norms and beliefs and support the development of a climate where youth feel safe. This approach also involved establishing a student leadership council to develop different mechanisms for allowing youth to speak out and create a school climate intolerant of TDV and IPV.	After conducting an initial school climate survey, the coalition provided training and technical assistance to school personnel on implementing the Shifting Boundaries program with all 6th and 7th grade students. This included making targeted changes to the school’s physical environment through a hot spot mapping activity that allowed students to identify areas that felt unsafe.



Key Lessons Learned

1. Attending to a school's readiness and buy-in for a comprehensive prevention approach is essential in setting the stage for successful implementation.
2. Aligning the selection of comprehensive approaches with school-specific needs and priorities facilitates the likelihood of successful implementation.
3. Demonstrating added value can facilitate school engagement and continued support for comprehensive prevention approaches.
4. Gradually introducing comprehensive approaches over time can enhance the quality and sustainability of implementation.

Key Lesson #1: Attending to a school's readiness and buy-in for a comprehensive prevention approach is essential in setting the stage for successful implementation.

All three community coalitions learned that implementing a comprehensive, school-based prevention approach is only as successful as the school's readiness to engage in multi-level programming. Gauging readiness and building and sustaining engagement may be particularly important for comprehensive approaches that require a greater commitment than traditional and standalone prevention programs. In particular, understanding the school's unique context and demands, and how those align and can be balanced with comprehensive programming, is critical for success.⁸ All three community coalitions described initially assessing participating schools' existing cultures and policies as well as the schools' early buy-in for the approach.



The coalitions learned that supportive school leadership is often an important indicator of readiness. For example, the Mississinewa Community Schools Corporation in Indiana expressed interest in further partnership with the Hands of Hope Community Coalition after reviewing their school's results from a student survey on school connectedness. School administrators signaled an immediate buy-in to the approach at this early project stage, assuring the community coalition that they would be productive partners. As described by a coalition staff member:

“ It was only Mississinewa that embraced it and said ‘we want to do this...we know if we make those changes we can see significant change in the life of students.’ And so they did [make the changes]... A noteworthy thing that I think is important to implementing these programs, is having buy-in from the top down... That is what made all the difference. ”

⁸ Kingston, B., Mattson, S. A., Dymnicki, A., Spier, E., Fitzgerald, M., Shipman, K., ... & Elliott, D. (2018). Building schools' readiness to implement a comprehensive approach to school safety. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 21(4), 433-449.

In Idaho, the Ada County Community Coalition learned that shared values were an important indicator of school readiness. Their school partner also had an interest in addressing school climate and focusing on gender equity, which provided the coalition with a starting point that facilitated buy-in for their prevention approach and paved the way for successful collaboration. As described by one staff member:

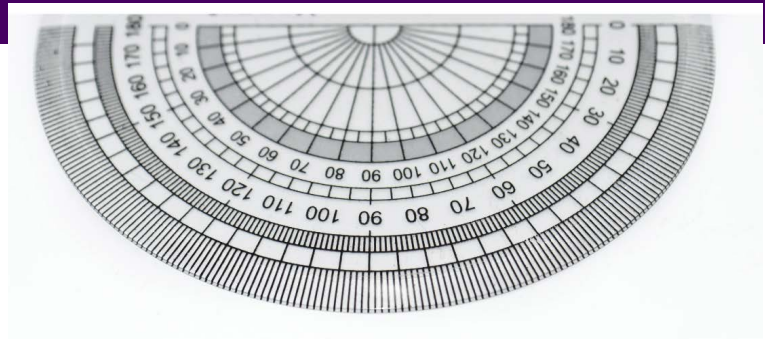
“ [It was important to have the] same values in the work as opposed to merely strategy... They saw the link with gender in every problem the school was experiencing including suicide, including drug abuse, including bullying. Just giving them the power that they need and stepping back and supporting the work rather than forcing it. We tried forcing it at another school and that went horribly. ”

The Ada County Community Coalition’s comprehensive approach also entailed working with neighborhood organizations, which similarly benefited from starting from a place of shared values. For example, they originally planned to cast a wider net and engage multiple community partners. However, they found greater success in partnering with one organization (a neighborhood community center) that was readily engaged and willing to do the work.

Importantly, each community coalition also found it important to monitor and re-assess readiness along the way to maintain school engagement and ensure the effectiveness of their comprehensive approach. For example, North Carolina’s New Hanover Community Coalition noted that due to staff turnover at their partner school, **“there’s always been change in how we have access to students and access to the school.”** Recognizing that staff turnover could impact readiness and buy-in for prevention programming, the coalition proactively planned for staff transitions by setting annual training objectives for school staff. They also made a point to meet new school administrators and counselors and to drop in for informal conversations with school staff, on an ongoing basis, to keep relationships strong. Maintaining these strong relationships with their school partner facilitated ongoing buy-in at the school level, which supported greater continuity in their prevention efforts over time.

Key Lesson #2: Aligning the selection of comprehensive approaches with school-specific needs and priorities facilitates the likelihood of successful implementation.

Working closely with school partners to consider whether the chosen comprehensive approach is appropriate for the unique needs of the students and school community is important for successful implementation. When designing their comprehensive approaches, all three community coalitions found it helpful to build on established evidence-informed curricula and other evidence-based prevention programs. However, once they gained buy-in from the schools, they also learned the importance of being flexible when selecting specific strategies to ensure alignment with school-specific concerns and existing capacity. Involving school partners in the decision-making process is often a strategy for success.⁸ For example, the Ada County Community Coalition observed early on that their partner school was already passionate about youth support groups and social marketing campaigns. They opted to leverage these existing resources as key elements of their planned approach. They also selected an existing evidence-based program, Coaching Boys into Men,⁹ after recognizing that the school had two coaches who were enthusiastic about their intended focus on gender equity. As noted by a coalition staff member:



“ The strategies, at least my point of view, are going to depend on which partners are at the table. You’re not going to be able to say, here’s a box to implement these three strategies for these three risk factors and whatnot because it was so driven on relationships, trust and support that was there. ”

Similarly, the Hands of Hope Community Coalition described their process of selecting prevention approaches as trial and error, in which additional layers of programming were added onto stable program structures already in existence in the schools. Furthermore, they learned the importance of leveraging areas of strength among school staff members to facilitate effective implementation. As described by one team member,

⁹ Miller, E., Tancredi, D. J., McCauley, H. L., Decker, M. R., Virata, M. C. D., Anderson, H. A., ... & Silverman, J. G. (2013). One-year follow-up of a coach-delivered dating violence prevention program: A cluster randomized controlled trial. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 45(1), 108-112.

“you learn to put people in the areas that they’re going to have the most successes.... Because when people are successful with something, they’re definitely going to buy into it a lot more. And that’s what’s going to help make your programming stronger.”

The New Hanover Community Coalition also emphasized the importance of working closely with school and community partners to ensure that their priorities, needs, and existing capacities align with the selected comprehensive approach. As stated by a coalition staff member, a key lesson was **“making sure that your partners [are] in the work, that it’s not only to benefit you, but it’s benefiting them. I think once you make it about them, that’s when the success stories begin to happen. I think that’s going to lead to long-term sustainability as well.”** Ensuring that the school partner’s needs are at the forefront when selecting the prevention approach can lead to more effective, sustainable implementation.

Key Lesson # 3: Demonstrating added value can facilitate school engagement and continued support for comprehensive prevention approaches.

Schools often have competing demands, and successfully implementing and sustaining prevention programming may require demonstrating mutual benefit to maintain commitment from school partners.⁸ All three community coalitions learned the strategic importance of highlighting



how comprehensive violence prevention approaches added value to the school community. The Hands of Hope Community Coalition noted that, even with the positive response they received from their school partners, they were still mindful of the need to communicate how their work would benefit the schools. One staff member recalled, **“when you go into the schools, you have to have patience. You have to sell your stories and, even though I was very passionate, I had to remember... this isn’t the first thing they focus on... Academics is where they need to put a lot of their priority.”**

The New Hanover Community Coalition also noted the importance of taking every opportunity to demonstrate the benefit of their comprehensive work to school partners in order to sustain buy-in. As noted by one coalition staff member, **“It’s important to be strategic... Because you need to be able to give a partner what they want in order for them to give you access.”** For example, by helping draw the connections between TDV, bullying in schools, and other public health issues, they could **“begin to catch the administrators’ ear.”** In addition, the New Hanover Community Coalition noted that once you get in the door, ongoing communication with school partners about implementation progress can be particularly powerful because it can help show that changes in the school environment are truly taking place.

Sharing data and evaluation findings was a particularly effective way to demonstrate value to schools at all stages of implementation. For both the Ada County and Hands of Hope Community Coalitions, sharing school climate data spurred schools’ initial engagement and buy-in. As described by one Ada County coalition staff member:

“ When we initially approached them, just a conversation about ‘hey what’s your school culture look like now and where do you want to see improvement?’ Here’s some data about what’s going well and what’s not. And they were able to really dive right into the culture and value system [they] want to build at [their] school. ”

Similarly, for the Hands of Hope Community Coalition, tracking and evaluating the impact of comprehensive programming also helped underscore how these efforts added value to the school community. A coalition staff member shared that **“for the bus program, it was easy to see immediate results...within months, we could already see that [disciplinary referrals from bus drivers] were dropping.”** These early successes encouraged further buy-in by demonstrating how each approach was already helping the school achieve the positive school environment they hoped to create for their students.

Key Lesson # 4: Gradually introducing comprehensive approaches over time can enhance the quality and sustainability of implementation.

Implementation of comprehensive approaches has the potential to increase the reach and impact of prevention efforts. However, such approaches can be difficult to sustain when schools have many other competing priorities. All three community coalitions indicated that at least one key component or level of their original planned approach was not fully

realized. To achieve their desired outcomes and enhance sustainability, each community coalition found it important to consider whether their various approaches were practical for the unique school environment. This sometimes involved sacrificing some of their planned programs to focus on more successful or time-intensive approaches. For example, the Hands of Hope Community Coalition initially selected four programs for their comprehensive school approach but over time, found it difficult to identify the appropriate staffing and resources to fully implement each program. As one school staff member explained:

“ I think when we entered into all these programs, it’s easy to get excited.... In reality, just the capacity to implement...all at once is pretty overwhelming. And so, I think once we took a step back and really dived into just one or two of those programs, and established those and made those sustainable, it makes it easier to [later add more]. ”

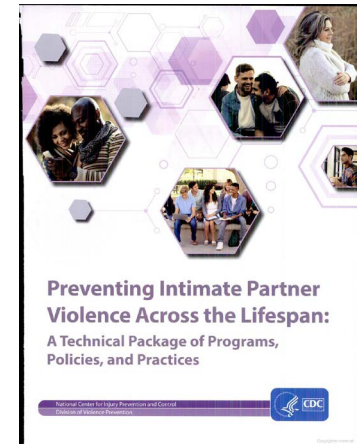
Similarly, the New Hanover Community Coalition emphasized that **“it’s not about quantity, how many [strategies] we do, but making sure that the quality, making sure that the process is done right.”** They learned that focusing on high-quality implementation is not only critical to achieving desired program outcomes, but also opens the door for introducing additional program components or strategies. The Ada County Community Coalition also opted to scale back specific approaches that had not gained traction and produced the impacts they hoped to see. One coalition team member noted:

“ [Some] strategies that were just not working didn’t warrant further resources... [one] was to engage parents. We had envisioned that...we’ll have a youth organizing group and then a parent organizing group to work some of the adults into the conversation. Tried that a number of times and people weren’t latching onto it. ”

Instead, the community coalition shifted their efforts towards disseminating a toolkit with resources on gender equity to parents and caregivers in their focus neighborhood. This adjustment allowed them to focus on their school-based efforts and **“driving that work more from within”** by connecting with partners already engaged and ready to do the work. Building a foundation of high-quality programming gave the coalitions the momentum to add additional strategies and sustain their efforts over time.

We Can Prevent IPV

IPV is a preventable public health problem, and we are continuing to learn more from practice and research about what works to prevent it. In 2017, CDC released *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices*,⁴ which helps states and communities take advantage of the best available evidence on preventing IPV across the lifespan. This technical package identified improving school climate and safety as one of multiple schoolbased approaches that can enhance safety, promote healthy relationships and respectful boundaries, and reduce tolerance for violence among students and school personnel.⁴ Ultimately, comprehensive school-based approaches represent an important part of preventing TDV and IPV. As communities experience greater prevention needs and requirements with limited prevention resources, comprehensive strategies may also provide efficient opportunities to address the community's priorities. As noted by the New Hanover Community Coalition:



“Prevention is really broad. There are a lot of approaches to prevention: there are lots of protective factors you can address, lots of risk factors you can address, lots of ways to do it – definitely with a multi-pronged project. So making sure that it really fits the community's priorities, needs, [and] capacities...I think is pretty key.”

This story offers lessons learned from a selection of coalitions who worked to create healthy and safe school environments by implementing comprehensive school-based approaches. While it is too early to provide any recommendations or evidence of effectiveness from these specific approaches, the implementers are willing to share implementation and evaluation elements they found to be practical and useful. For more information, contact:

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This report was prepared under the guidelines of the previous administration. We are now aligning our processes and documentation with the directives of the current administration.

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