



A CASE STUDY OF PREVENTION STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SHARED RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Building Public Support for District-Wide Implementation of
Evidence-based Social Emotional Learning

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Introduction

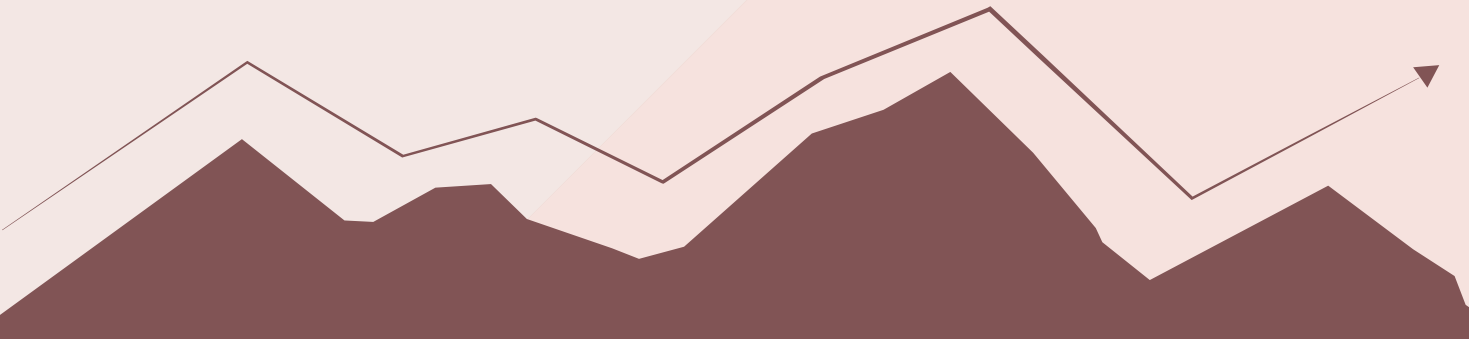
In recent years, Colorado community coalitions leveraging the Communities That Care (CTC) model implemented evidence-based upstream prevention strategies to address shared risk and protective factors that impact health and behavior outcomes. In partnership with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), researchers on the Technical Assistance and Evaluation team at the University of Colorado Anschutz's Colorado School of Public Health (the CU team) directly supported communities implementing CTC and prevention strategies. As part of this support, the CU team collected data from communities who implemented a prevention strategy to Build Public Support for District-Wide Implementation of Evidenced-based Social Emotional Learning (SEL).

The goal of this data collection effort was to highlight best practices and challenges faced by communities implementing this prevention strategy. This case study report was produced to help any community organizing for prevention to gain a deeper understanding of how the prevention strategy works in practice. This report provides valuable information based on community lived experience by noting strategy successes and challenges.

Communities organizing for prevention can use the best practices featured in this report in the planning and implementation of prevention strategies locally. In addition, awareness of common issues and pitfalls can help set up other communities for success and streamline progress.

In January 2021, the CU team began collecting data from pre-recorded affinity group (prevention strategy) meetings and focus group interviews. Data analysis began in April 2021, and final reports were written in August 2021. Of note is that prevention strategy implementation largely occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is important context surrounding the challenges experienced by communities. Analysis of focus group interviews and prevention strategy meetings revealed best practices that encouraged the success of the strategy.

Following is a summary of the results, and major themes are discussed in more detail in this report.



Gathering information first; inclusion of diverse youth perspectives; centering around connection and relationships; building capacity; and understanding existing community efforts were all things that led to the success of the strategy. However, School System Logistics; unclear direction; power dynamics; and turnover within the system of support were challenges encountered by the communities implementing this work.

Methods

This project aimed to collect data from prevention strategy meetings and focus group interviews about evidence-based upstream prevention strategy implementation to focus on the experiences of Colorado community coalitions and highlight best practices and challenges. The results featured in this case study report can assist communities organizing for prevention in current or future implementation efforts.



Focus group interviews were conducted with community members involved in the SEL prevention strategy that had been implemented locally for more than six months.



Audio recordings of interviews and prevention strategy meetings were transcribed with transcription software and reviewed for accuracy.



Transcripts were examined for meaningful statements and phrases, which were noted using a defined code. All statements that embodied each code were analyzed for overarching ideas and themes.

Major themes were separated into two distinct categories highlighting the prevention strategy's

1. Best Practices
2. Challenges experienced during implementation

In addition, communities offered recommendations for success for other communities planning to implement this strategy in the future.

Acknowledgements

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Strategy Results: Social Emotional Learning

Recommendations For Social Emotional Learning

- Start with understanding what SEL looks like district-wide and what other efforts exist in the community.
- Be inclusive when getting youth perspective by making sure that you reach youth with a variety of lived experience.
- Listen to what the data and community history tell you and develop your plan based on that.
- Keep relationships and connection at the forefront.

Best Practices

Gather information first

Communities who started their work conducting an analysis of the SEL and health policy work in their school district built themselves a foundation that guided the implementation plan. The coalition was able to listen to the data and decide on which path to go on from there. For example, when a coalition recognized that there was no health requirement for high school graduation, they decided to focus on policy change.

Inclusion of diverse youth perspectives

Many populations continue to be impacted by a system of oppression that exists in our society. Youth of color, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth experiencing homelessness are often not included in conversations about policies in our school system. Coalitions were dedicated to expanding their reach to involve students with a variety of lived experience. They also included a trauma-informed approach to the work as well as focusing on creating trust with youth members.

Center around connection and relationships

Relationship building and collaboration are key to strategy implementation. Taking time to create a space where everyone feels comfortable and are given opportunities to connect with each other allow people working on the strategy to create deep connections. When people feel more connected to others working with them, they simultaneously feel more closely connected to the work itself.

Build capacity in SEL

When attempting policy change and strategy implementation, it is important to build the knowledge and skills of the group. Coalitions found that when members were able to learn new skills, their engagement in the project deepened. The members were also able to take the product of their work and share it with a variety of stakeholders.

Understanding existing community efforts

Prevention work doesn't happen in a silo, so a great place to start is to see what other efforts are already happening in the community. Has SEL been implemented before? Is it still being implemented? What did that implementation look like and why isn't it still happening? Answering questions like these can help your group decide on a direction for the strategy implementation.

Challenges

School system administration and operations

Our school systems can be extremely busy. Communities found that they had to be cautious about when to ask about policies with their school partners. The start or end of the semester and turnover of the super intendent or in the school board can cause schools to be too busy to participate. Schools were also reluctant to invite conversations about updating policies that had recently been changed.

Unclear direction

When working on the SEL strategy, communities often felt unclear about what to do or where to start. Coalitions wanted to address a variety of different things when starting this strategy but found it difficult to decide on a single direction.

Power dynamics

Understanding the power dynamics at play when working with school districts was something that coalitions had intentionally consider. Taking it slow and building relationships over time is key. If you move too quickly, you risk losing the relationship that is vital to implementing the SEL strategy work.

Turnover within the system of support

Strategy implementation requires support from within and outside of the coalition. Turnover in coaching, technical assistance support teams, as well as the coalition itself can stall implementation.