

ACCESS 2009-2010 Summary: Gang Prevention and Intervention

SSHS Focus Area: Safe school environments and violence prevention activities

ACCESS Goal: *Decrease gang activity on campuses*

Program Overview

Austin Community Collaboration to Enhance Student Success (ACCESS) first funded a gang specialist school resource officer (SRO) in Fall 2007 to decrease gang activity on campuses and to educate students, parents, and community members about gangs (LaTurner, Basu, & Samii-Shore, 2009). In August 2009, the gang specialist SRO position was raised to a gang detective position. The ACCESS-funded gang detective is a member of the Joint Juvenile Gang Intervention Unit (JJGIU), along with another detective from the Austin Independent School District (AISD) Police Department, and two detectives and a gang prevention coordinator from the Austin Police Department. The JJGIU was formed in response to a Joint Steering Committee on Gang Activity recommendation in 2006, and added prevention and intervention efforts to law-enforcement gang suppression work. As part of the JJGIU, the gang detective made presentations to elementary, middle, and high school students and parents and taught the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program to 4th-grade students. She also worked with campus administrators and SROs to add proactive strategies to what was, before the JJGIU, a mostly reactive program focused on discipline referrals.

The inclusion of an additional AISD detective in the JJGIU increased its capacity and leveraged the impact of its work on AISD campuses. The JJGIU functions as an integrated unit, and the program implementation section that follows describes both the JJGIU and specific activities of the ACCESS-funded gang detective.

What is ACCESS?

Funded through a 4-year federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SSHS) grant, ACCESS is an AISD-led community collaboration of public and nonprofit agencies working together to address the emotional, behavioral, and social needs of students.

Program Implementation

The evaluation team collected monthly summaries of gang detective activities, supplemented by weekly reports that detailed her work to identify campus needs, develop plans and presentation materials, and contribute to regional coordination. Data on activities also were obtained from JJGIU program records. In addition, the evaluation team interviewed the gang detective and observed educational presentations she made at one elementary school.



The current gang detective began work in August 2009. The detective attended a Juvenile Gang and Violence training in September 2009 and was trained and certified as a G.R.E.A.T. instructor by the Bureau of Justice in December 2009. The JJGIU prevention plan includes presentations to elementary and secondary students and the G.R.E.A.T. program for 4th grade students. The G.R.E.A.T. elementary curriculum consists of six 30- to 45-minute lessons to teach life skills and build positive bonds between youth and law enforcement officers.

During 2009–2010, the gang detective participated in 113 presentations to students; AISD staff; and other adults who work with youth, parents, and community members. Presentations were made at 18 elementary schools, 13 secondary schools, and other community settings. They were attended by 2,293 youth, 504 AISD staff members, 247 parents, and 285 other adults who work with youth. During Spring 2010, the gang detective taught the G.R.E.A.T. program to 110 students in six 4th-grade classes at two elementary campuses. JJGIU officers taught the G.R.E.A.T. curriculum to a total of 747 students in 2009–2010.

Table 1. Gang Detective Training and Campus Assessment Activities, 2009–2010

Gang detective training and campus assessment activities	Number
Presentations	113
Campus consultations	104
Gang assessments	108

Source. Gang detective activity reports, 2009–2010

The education and training activities of the gang detective are targeted at campuses with known gang activity and at feeder schools for those campuses, and are scheduled in response to campus concerns about gang activity. The gang detective consults with campus administrators, counselors, and SROs to discuss whether they have concerns about gang activity. When gang activity is identified as a possible problem, the gang detective conducts a gang assessment, which is a visual survey for signs of gang activity on campus.

During 2009–2010, the gang detective conducted 104 campus consultations and 108 gang assessments (Table 1). In response to gang assessments, the gang detective worked closely with administrators, SROs, and counselors to develop recommendations for campus staff, and JJGIU plans for educational and law enforcement activities. The JJGIU's responses to the findings of gang assessments included presentations for students and parents, campus staff training, and increased patrols and police visibility. The gang detective also made home visits; worked directly with youth and their families; documented gang members and associates for SROs; and made gang activity citations and warrant arrests, as necessary. In addition to prevention and law enforcement activities, the JJGIU partnered with organizations providing case-management services to youth trying to step back from the gang lifestyle. Connecting youth to these services is a critical means of intervention for youth already involved in gang activity (Austin Public Safety Commission Meeting, 2010).

Program Outcomes

The work of the gang detective, part of the ACCESS continuum of anti-violence curricula, is aimed specifically at reducing gang activity in schools. The ACCESS logic model specifies a 5% reduction

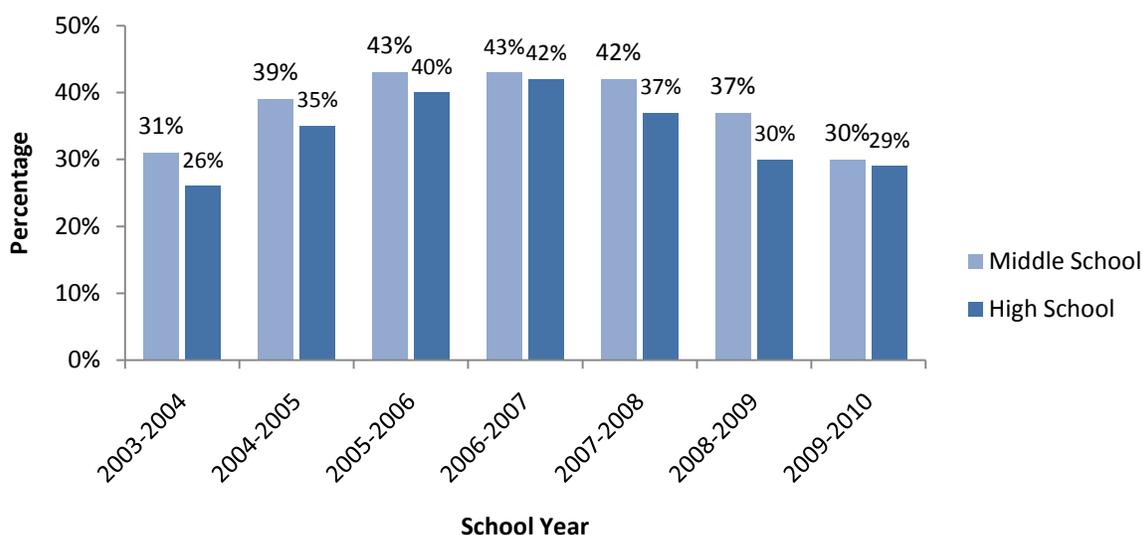


in students' reports of gang activity on the annual Student Substance Use and Safety Survey, as an indicator of program effectiveness. In addition, evaluation staff analyzed staff member reports of campus gang activity and AISD discipline records.

The AISD Student Substance Use and Safety survey is administered each spring to a random, representative sample of AISD students (Naik, 2010). Students are asked to respond to the question "To the best of your knowledge, how often do gang activities occur at your school?" Response options are *happens daily*, *happens at least once a week*, *happens at least once a month*, *happens on occasion*, and *never happens*. The first three response options are used as an indicator of regular gang activity.

Since 2007–2008, the school year in which the JJGIU began, students' reports of gang activity at school have consistently declined, reversing a trend of increased reports of gang activity between 2003–2004 and 2006–2007 (Figure 1). In 2006–2007, 43% of middle school students and 40% of high school students reported gang activity occurring regularly at their school. By 2009–2010, reports of regular gang activity had dropped to 30% of middle school students and 29% of high school students, a decrease of 13 percentage points for middle school students and a decrease of 11 percentage points for high school students. These drops far exceed the ACCESS goal of a 5% reduction in students' reports of gang activity.

Figure 1. AISD Middle and High School Students Reporting Regular Gang Activity at Their School



Source. AISD Student Substance Use and Safety Surveys, 2003–2004 through 2009–2010, Department of Program Evaluation

Note. Gang activity is considered regular when students respond *happens at least once a month*, *happens at least once a week*, or *happens daily* to the question "To the best of your knowledge, how often do gang activities occur at your school?"

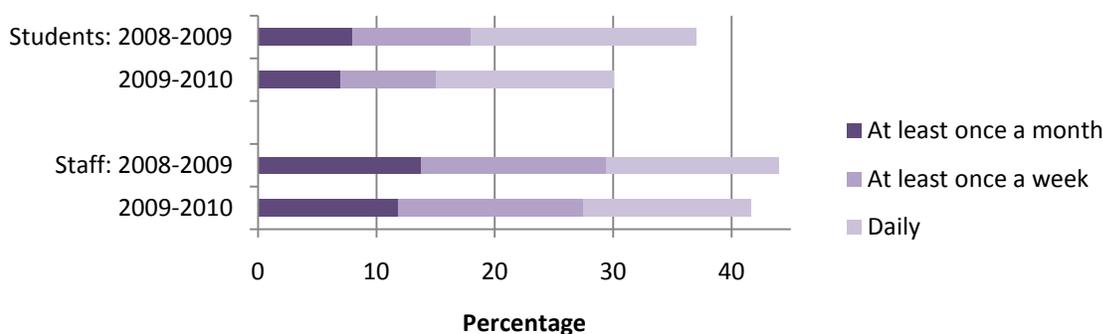
Although students' reports of gang activity at their schools have dropped, concerns about gang pressures on Austin youth have risen because of the increased use of Austin by drug cartels (KEYE News, 2010). The Austin Police Department (2010) documented an 18% increase in gang-related incidents between 2008 and 2009, from 1,697 to 2,060. During a briefing to the Austin Public Safety Commission

(Austin Public Safety Commission Meeting, 2010), representatives of the Austin Police Department and the Texas Department of Safety described a shift in local youth gangs toward affiliation with drug cartels.

The effect of gang prevention work in the schools was further examined through comparisons between 2008–2009 and 2009–2010 reports of student gang activity, as well as discipline incidents for minor gang activity. The prevention impact was expected to be stronger at middle schools than at high schools because most of the educational presentations delivered by the JJGIU were targeted at elementary and middle school students. For example, in 2009–2010, 98% of the 2,293 youth who attended gang detective educational presentations were elementary or middle school students.

Among middle school students, the percentage reporting that gang activity occurred at least once a month or more frequently at their school decreased from 37% in Spring 2009 to 30% in Spring 2010. A similar, though less dramatic, pattern was seen among middle school staff, as reported on the Staff Climate Survey administered in the fall. The percentage of middle school staff reporting that gang activity occurred at least once a month or more frequently decreased from 44% in Fall 2008 to 42% in Fall 2009 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Middle School Students and Staff: How Often Do Gang Activities Occur at Your School?

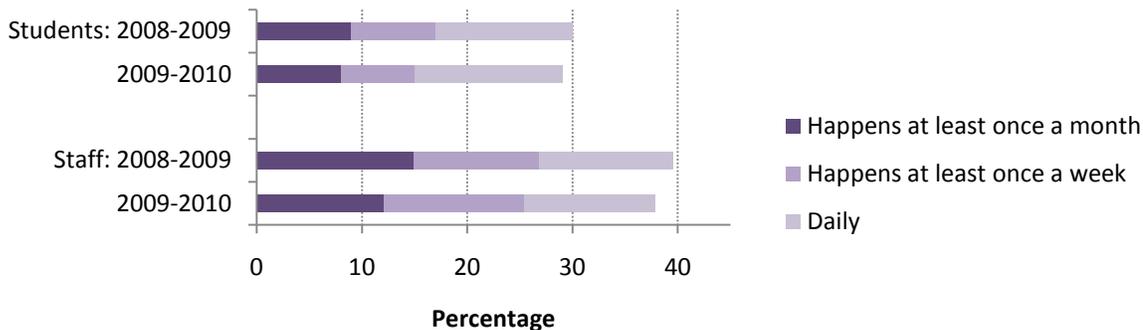


Source. AISD Student Substance Use and Safety Survey 2010 and AISD Staff Climate Surveys, 2008–2009 and 2009–2010, Department of Program Evaluation

Note. The majority of students responded that gang activity happens either *on occasion* or *never*.

Among high school students, reports that gang activity occurred at least once a month or more frequently was, on average, unchanged between Spring 2009 and Spring 2010 (30% and 29%, respectively). The percentage of high school staff members reporting that gang activity occurred at least once a month or more was also unchanged, at about 39% in Fall 2008 and Fall 2009 (Figure 3). As expected, the year-to-year decrease in reports of gang activities, by both students and staff, was less at high schools than at middle schools.

Figure 3. High School Students and Staff: How Often Do Gang Activities Occur at Your School?



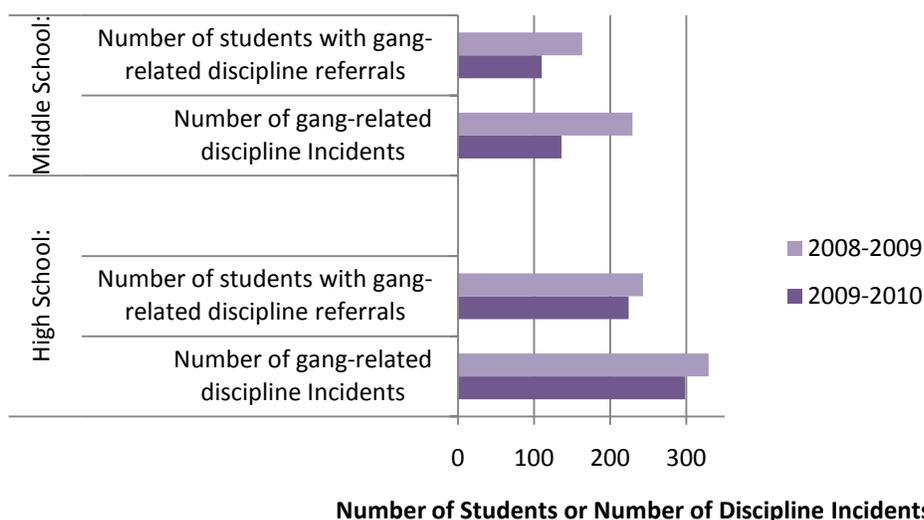
Source. AISD Student Substance Use and Safety Survey 2010 and AISD Staff Climate Surveys, 2008–2009 and 2009–2010, Department of Program Evaluation

Note. The majority of students responded that gang activity happens either *on occasion* or *never*.

Students were asked to report whether any of their friends belonged to a gang and whether they themselves took part in any gang activities during the school year. In Spring 2010, 28% of middle school students reported that their friends belonged to a gang, down from 35% in Spring 2009. Middle school students' reports of their own participation in gang activity fell from 9% in Spring 2009 to 7% in Spring 2010. The percentage of high school students reporting having friends who were members of a gang remained the same between Spring 2009 and Spring 2010 (28%), as did the percentage reporting their own participation in gang activities (6%).

Campus disciplinary actions related to minor gang activity (e.g., dress code violations and throwing signs) were examined for middle and high school students, comparing the number of discipline referrals for gang activity in 2008–2009 with the number in 2009–2010 (Figure 4). Among middle school students, the number of gang activity discipline incidents fell from 229 to 136 incidents, a decrease of 41%. The number of students involved in gang activity discipline incidents fell from 163 to 110, a decrease of 33%. The average number of times students were disciplined for gang activity decreased at middle schools from 1.40 to 1.24 incidents. Among high school students, the number of gang activity discipline incidents fell from 329 to 298, a decrease of 9%. The number of students involved in gang activity discipline incidents fell from 243 to 224, a decrease of 8%. The average number of times students were disciplined for gang activity was unchanged between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 (1.35 and 1.33, respectively).

Figure 4. Middle and High School Student Gang Activity Discipline Referrals



Source. AISD student discipline data extracted from DEEDS through ADIS as of 2/23/11

Changes in discipline referrals for minor gang activity could reflect factors such as gang activity trends in the city of Austin and increased campus staff awareness of gang signs. Another factor that makes interpretation of changes in discipline referrals difficult is that the increased use of local youth gangs by drug cartels may have led to decreases in visible gang activity on AISD campuses if youth gang members were encouraged to maintain a lower profile while at school or to drop out of school (Austin Public Safety Commission Meeting, 2010).

Summary of Findings

The ACCESS goal for the gang detective is to decrease gang activity on AISD campuses. The following list summarizes the findings of the 2009–2010 evaluation regarding students' reports, staff reports, and AISD discipline records of campus gang activities, as well as the prevention and law enforcement interventions of the ACCESS-funded gang detective.

Activities:

- The gang detective participated in 113 presentations, which were attended by 2,293 AISD youth, 504 AISD staff, 247 parents, and 285 other adults who work with youth.
- The gang detective taught the Gang Resistance Education and Training program to 110 students in six elementary school classes at two campuses.
- The gang detective conducted 104 campus consultations and 108 gang assessments.

Outcomes:

- Since 2007–2008, students' reports of gang activity at both middle schools and high schools have declined, reversing a trend of increased reports of gang activity in the years preceding the JJGIU's prevention efforts.

- Both actual incidents and perceptions of gang activity among middle school students and staff declined from 2008–2009 to 2009–2010.
 - Between 2008–2009 and 2009–2010, the percentage of middle school students reporting that gang activity occurred at least once a month or more frequently dropped from 37% to 30%.
 - The percentage of middle school students reporting that friends belonged to a gang fell from 35% in Spring 2009 to 28% in Spring 2010.
 - The percentage of middle school students reporting that they took part in gang activities fell from 9% in Spring 2009 to 7% in Spring 2010.
 - The percentage of middle school staff members reporting that gang activity occurred at least once a month or more frequently fell from 44% in Fall 2008 to 42% in Fall 2009.
 - Among middle school students, the number of minor gang activity discipline incidents decreased between 2008–2009 and 2009–2010 from 229 to 136 incidents, a decrease of 41%. The number of middle school students involved in minor gang activity discipline incidents fell from 163 to 110, a decrease of 33%.
 - The average number of times middle school students disciplined for gang activity decreased between 2008–2009 and 2009–2010 from 1.40 to 1.24 incidents.
- Perceptions of gang activity among high school students and staff was unchanged between 2008–2009 and 2009–2010.
- Minor gang activity among high school students decreased between 2008–2009 and 2009–2010.
 - Among high school students, the number of minor gang activity discipline incidents decreased between 2008–2009 and 2009–2010 from 329 to 298, an decrease of 9%.
 - The number of high school students involved in gang activity incidents fell from 243 to 224, an decrease of 8%.
 - The average number of times high school students were disciplined for gang activity was unchanged between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 (1.35 and 1.33, respectively).
- A point of interest is that the decrease in incidents and perceptions of gang activity was greater among middle school students, who had more opportunity to experience the JJGIU's prevention efforts, than it was for high school students.

Recommendations

Recommendations from the 2008–2009 evaluation report (LaTurner et al., 2009) and the status of these recommendations are as follows:

- “The ACCESS team and the specialist should examine campus-level gang activity data to determine which campuses have a high need for services and focus appropriate services based on those data.”

Status: During 2009–2010, the JJGIU regularly assessed campus needs and planned educational and law enforcement interventions to address those needs.



- “With an eye to sustainability, ACCESS staff should follow up by aligning activities with the comprehensive gang model for use in future grant writing.”

Status: This recommendation has not been addressed. However, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Comprehensive Gang Model (CGM) is “resource intensive” and meant for implementation in communities “with a serious, violent, and entrenched gang problem” (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2009, p. 6). The model as a whole may not meet current needs. The CGM implementation manual specifies strategies for schools (p. 25), including outreach and education for parents. Implementation of this element of the CGM could be improved through better coordination among AISD positions, which include parent outreach and education.

Recommendations for 2010–2011:

- Realign the goals and logic model for the ACCESS gang prevention and intervention program to take into consideration regional gang trends and community-wide goals.
- Increase coordination among AISD gang prevention, dropout prevention, and parent support programs in order to strengthen the parent component of gang prevention.
- Identify target schools and feeder schools, based upon JJGIU records of gang activity, and document 2010–2011 program plans and activities designed to reduce gang activity at the target schools.
- Identify how AISD gang activity data from district surveys and discipline records can better support the work of the JJGIU; identify and fill information gaps.

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