

Feedback and Take-Aways Mayor's Office Meetings

Overview

The Department of Violence Prevention (DVP), in partnership with Mayor Thao's Office, hosted meetings in February and March 2023 with key staff from the seven high schools participating in the pilot year of the School Violence Intervention and Prevention (VIP) Program. These meetings were an opportunity for school and program staff to hear from the DVP about the strategy's objectives and implementation thus far and to hear from the Mayor's Office regarding origins of the School VIP Program and Mayor Thao's broader approach to public safety. Most importantly, these meetings provided a platform for the DVP and Mayor's Office to receive feedback from participating school administrators, VIP team members, and staff from partner community-based organizations (CBOs).

Meeting participants were asked to consider the following questions:

- How is the strategy going at your school?
- What feedback/suggestions do you have to improve the strategy?
- What are current safety concerns and needs at your school?

Feedback and Take-Aways

While each high school provided unique feedback and suggestions to improve the strategy, there were common themes that ran through all meetings. These themes are represented below:

What are current safety concerns and needs at your school?

- The unpredictable nature of violence incidents make them hard to prevent.
- Fighting among students (particularly young women) has increased since COVID, resulting in more suspensions.
- There has been an uptick since COVID in instances of individuals who do not attend the schools coming onto campus with weapons and/or threatening students.
- Students are carrying weapons onto school campus.
- There has been an increase in student drug use (especially marijuana) on school campus and off.
- Violence from the community is spilling over and resulting in more on-campus altercations.

How is the strategy going at your school?

Student Groups:

- Gender-based violence (GBV) "girls groups" and peer educator groups are going well and a great way to reach students.
- The healthy relationships elective has been successful way to reach students during the school day.

Relationship Building:

- VIP team members are proactive about building relationships with students and initiate relationships without instruction from school staff.
- Life coaches speak the students' language, which helps to build rapport.
- Violence interrupters are flexible and go above and beyond to connect with students, including helping to locate students who have missed a significant number of school days.
- VIP teams on campus provide more support for school staff in reducing incidents of violence.

Professional Development for School Staff:

- Staff trainings by the GBV educator are very helpful and needed.

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What feedback/suggestions do you have to improve the strategy?

Student Eligibility:

- Eligibility requirements for students to participate in life-coaching are tight. Is there a way to be more flexible and ultimately engage more students?

Family Engagement:

- VIP teams could more effectively support students if there was engagement with the families at events like open houses, home visits, and school family engagement events.
- As a preventive measure, it would be helpful if violence interrupters were able to do home visits to follow up with high-risk students.

Relationship Building:

- If each high school had its own designated VIP team (instead of two high schools sharing a GBV educator and violence interrupter), the strategy would be much more effective. Students would be able to get to know VIP team members better, and VIP team members would have more visibility on campus, build stronger relationships with school staff, and serve more students.
- GBV educators need confidential spaces to meet with students to ensure trust building.

Professional Development:

- School staff would benefit from training from VIP teams on topics related to violence (e.g. signs and symptoms of violence) the roles of each VIP team member, and opportunities for collaboration to serve students.
- Proactively exposing school staff to VIP teams before the school year will help foster relationships and provide staff an opportunity to incorporate team members into lesson planning.

Communication:

- With OUSD: Better communication between the DVP and OUSD central office is needed to ensure CBOs involved in School VIP Program are informed on OUSD policies and procedures before implementing programming.
- Within VIP teams: It is critical that VIP teams function as a coordinated team. Teams would benefit from cross training regarding different team members' roles and areas of violence prevention. Additionally, teams should be meeting more regularly to discuss overlap of served students, build rapport, and provide support to one another.
- Across VIP teams: This level of communication is critical, given that it could help prevent incidents of violence. This includes working with administrators to identify transfer students who may be at risk entering a new high school based on external conflicts or group affiliation.
- With School Administration and Staff: The roles of each school VIP team member need to be solidified and communicated to all partners involved in the School VIP Program. A schedule of when VIP team members are on campus and available needs to be provided to school staff.