

Recommendation 3:



Utilize schools to deliver group support that teaches kids to pause before they act.



Overview: Supports at Schools

As Yale sociologist Eli Anderson noted in his critically acclaimed book, *Code of the Streets*, some children grow up in neighborhoods where the expectation is that aggression will be met with aggression.

You fight, or you risk the reputation of being an easy victim. Maintaining one's respect, typically using interpersonal violence, is all that matters to the detriment of the long-term consequences of one's actions.

Fighting can become an automatic response to real or perceived provocations. Even conflicts that start out about trivial issues too often escalate to the point of fatal consequences.

In recent years, schools across Dallas have thoughtfully integrated social-emotional learning into their academic mission: schools now intentionally teach lessons to students about mindfulness, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, relationship skills, and more. All students need and benefit from these skills. However, for students at high risk of finding themselves in violent surroundings, an even deeper investment to provide small group support through our schools that teach the benefits of slowing down thoughts and actions may be life-saving.



CASE STUDY

In Chicago Public Schools,
specialized support led
to a crime reduction by
participating students of
49%.

Execution

- Sister programs developed by a Chicago nonprofit teach teens from struggling areas to recognize and handle their emotions with cognitive behavioral therapy techniques.
- The counseling program tailored for boys — Becoming A Man (BAM) — focuses on impulse control, emotional self-regulation, social cues, and personal responsibility and integrity. The program for girls — Working On Womanhood (WOW) — emphasizes coping with trauma.

Results

The first trial looked at outcomes for 2,740 youths and one academic year of BAM. The second test considered more than 2,000 teens and two years of BAM. Researchers divided the teens into two camps — with and without BAM — to compare results and found:

- BAM reduced participants' total arrests by 28% to 35% and violent-crime arrests by 45% to 50% during the intervention period.
- The high school graduation rate of the first group increased by up to 19%.

The third trial evaluated the outcomes for nearly 2,700 male detainees at the Cook County JTDC and found that the behavioral curriculum reduced readmission rates by 21%.

Chicago's Becoming A Man (BAM) Program

Sister programs developed by a Chicago nonprofit teach teens from distressed neighborhoods to recognize and handle their emotions with cognitive behavioral therapy techniques. The counseling program tailored for boys — Becoming A Man, or BAM — focuses on impulse control, emotional self-regulation, recognition of social cues, and developing a sense of personal responsibility and integrity. The program for girls — Working On Womanhood, or WOW — emphasizes coping with trauma, but has yet to be subject to rigorous empirical research.

A key lesson for participants is how to slow down their thoughts and actions, i.e., how to counteract the impulse to behave automatically by instead pausing, assessing the situation, and ultimately making wise choices. These are necessary skills for all children to develop in order to succeed in education, the workforce, and within interpersonal relationships, but they can be life-saving for kids growing up around violence.

The program promotes positive psychological development, builds resiliency, and teaches critical behavior skills for students with risk factors like suspensions, truancy, drug or alcohol abuse, gang involvement, and violence.

Similar strategies are being used throughout Canada, and increasingly in the United States, modeled after the Stop Now and Plan (SNAP) strategy, which has received strong support for improving self-control and decision-making and reducing aggression and delinquency.

Still led by an area nonprofit, BAM is now in many Chicago Public Schools (CPS) sites. Students meet for weekly group sessions at school, where a counselor who specializes in psychology or social work guides them through conversations and exercises. These activities are lessons on decision-making, not lectures on the “right thing” to do. In the case of BAM, providers recognize that teens live in places that will push them to stand up for themselves, but the message is that fighting should be a last resort. For example, in “the fist” exercise, BAM participants are asked to get a ball from a partner in 30 seconds. Many boys try to use force, but after the exercise, questioning from the counselor shows most of those boys' partners would have handed over the ball if asked nicely.

A similar program was launched at the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC) in Cook County, where high-risk juvenile detainees from the Chicago area await trial.

Researchers conducted randomized controlled trials — among the most rigorous kind of scientific evaluation — to study the impact of BAM and the JTDC curriculum on crime.

The first trial looked at outcomes for 2,740 youths and one academic year of BAM programming in 2009-10. The second test considered more than 2,000 teens and two years of BAM programming in 2013-15. The researchers divided the teens into two camps — the group that got BAM programming and the group that didn't — to compare results and found:

- BAM reduced participants' total arrests by 28% to 35% and violent-crime arrests by 45% to 50% during the intervention period.
- The high school graduation rate of the first group increased by up to 19%.

The third trial evaluated the outcomes for nearly 2,700 male detainees at the Cook County JTDC from late 2009 to early 2011. That analysis found that the behavioral curriculum reduced readmission rates by 21%.



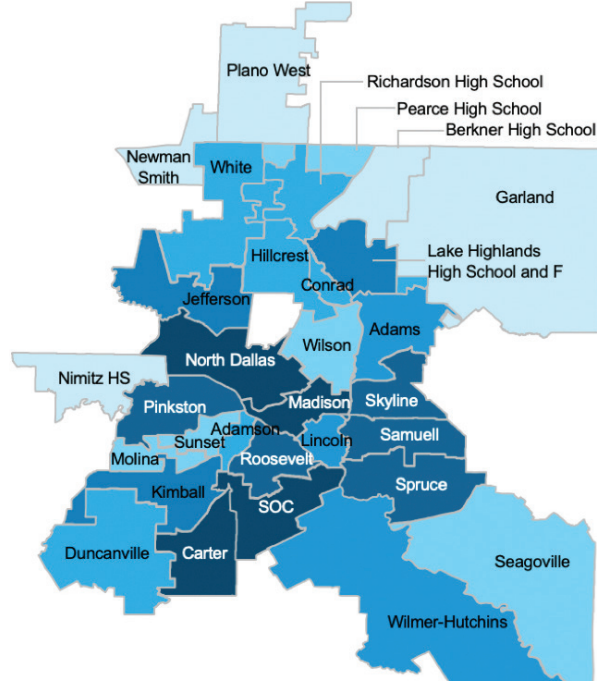
Taking Action

The following analysis brings a lens of local action to the cited national research. The methodologies outlined are intended to give policymakers, officials, and local leaders a starting point to improve upon for maximizing the impact of every dollar spent.

To begin the analysis, Dallas was split into 31 high school attendance zones utilizing shapefiles from Dallas ISD and Richardson ISD. Data provided by DPD indicating the location of juvenile violent crime incidents were then layered into the map. [See Figure 12]

FIGURE 12

Juvenile Violent Crime Incidents



BAM: Small group support session in CPS schools.
Source: Youth Guidance

SOURCE: Crime data provided by Dallas Police Department
Analysis supported by Child Poverty Action Lab (CPAL)



Extrapolating Cost and Impact

While many factors are likely to determine which schools would be best for an initial rollout of a program providing the small group support intervention, we'll illustrate the cost and extrapolated impact by examining the budget for a single school.

In the Chicago study, the average cost of the BAM program after adjusting for inflation was \$1,740.50 per student. If 200 students are served at a given school annually, the program cost per year would total \$348,000. Additionally, the extrapolated impact would be an average reduction of 16.6 juvenile violence incidents per year or .49 incidents per \$10,000 spent. [See Figure 13]

FIGURE 13

Sample Calculation Per Site		
Number of male students participating in program	200	Chicago BAM: Sites generally serve 200+ male students
Total annual program cost	\$348,000	Chicago BAM: Average cost per student is \$1,740.50
Reduction in violent crime incidents per year	16.6	Chicago BAM program estimates 48.8% reduction in violent crime arrests for participating students
Number of incidents prevented per \$10,000 spent	0.49	



Impact Calculation: Per Site

16.6

reduction in violent crimes involving a juvenile per year

.49

reduction in violent crimes involving a juvenile per \$10,000



GETTING STARTED:

- City and Dallas ISD officials already have ongoing collaborative meetings. An immediate first step would be for a select set of officials from those meetings to take a trip to Chicago to jointly study the BAM program and all operational requirements.
- As is often the case with new programs, starting small with a pilot at two to three sites will allow for operations and program supports to be optimized. It will also allow for corresponding evaluation to inform scaling decisions.
- All of the Task Force's core recommendations should include ongoing evaluation. Over time, it is critical to know whether evidence-based strategies are being implemented as outlined in research and if public investments are yielding results. Given that the most credible evaluations are independently-funded and university-led, we encourage philanthropy to consider this as one of many ways to meaningfully support public safety in Dallas.