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Interrupting Violence in Boston Before It Turns Deadly

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SCHOOL BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS STRENGTHEN PREVENTION EFFORTS: THE FORUM EMBRACES PBIS

by Alison Lake Benadada

School systems, which are at the core of every community and significantly influence youth behavior, are integral to any broad efforts to reduce violence in communities. To help mitigate youth behavior problems and causes, many school districts and state departments of education employ the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework in schools. The PBIS framework is used to guide selection, integration, and implementation of best practices for improving behavior in all students.

In 2013 the Forum built on its own existing initiatives to prevent youth violence by adding PBIS to its broader strategy. The Forum's 10 cities now receive technical assistance to fully implement PBIS in schools.

Learning Disabilities, Low Classroom

IN BOSTON'S MATTAPAN NEIGHBORHOOD, FIVE WORK TO INTERRUPT VIOLENCE

by Dave Marsden

Murder is horrific and ineradicable. The crime itself is usually solved. But its repercussions devastate family and friends (both the victim's and the perpetrator's), haunting them with questions such as *Why did this happen?* and *How could it have been prevented?*

In our Forum cities, a single act of murder can have consequences that reach far and persist for generations, affecting the community in ways that are extremely difficult to foresee and respond to. But what if conflict could be interrupted before it escalated to violence, or violence interrupted before it turned deadly?

A Countervailing Community Presence

Boston, Mass., has had a "Streetworkers" program for 30 years that supports individuals in all of Boston's communities. Forty Streetworkers connect them to critical services, deal with disputes, and solve problems. In 2011 the Boston Community-Based Violence Prevention Demonstration Project grant was awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Its three goals were to

- Target young "shooters."
- Intervene with shooters and their families in a public health-oriented effort.
- Strengthen the Ceasefire Program effort in Boston to ensure that it was keeping up with the changing nature of Boston's gang culture.

Five Violence Interrupters were hired to meet these goals and to augment the Streetworkers who already served in the Mattapan neighborhood, which had become a hot spot for violence. Mattapan, on Boston's South Side, had become a "hot spot" for violence. The five interrupters were stationed in the community to begin tracking potential shooters and prevent them from becoming perpetrators.

Skills Risk Factors for Violent Behavior

The overlap of youth violent behavior with other life factors is clear. Youths with learning disabilities are more likely to engage in violent behavior (Mallett 2011). Many at-risk youths also lack basic academic, social, and problem-solving skills and have experienced abuse.

In addition to these risk factors, concerns about bullying and youth safety have influenced priority initiatives for violence prevention in schools (Sugai et al. 2011). Schoolwide PBIS is a universal, schoolwide prevention strategy that is currently implemented in more than 20,000 schools nationwide to reduce disruptive behavior problems through the application of behavioral, social learning, and organizational behavioral principles (Farkas et al. 2012). A growing literature base supports the efficacy of schoolwide PBIS interventions, particularly in students identified with emotional disturbance (Farkas et al. 2012). PBIS has been shown to reduce suspensions and encourage students to follow rules more consistently (Ward 2010; Barnoski 2001).

At schools that implement the PBIS framework, staff members receive PBIS coaching, support, and materials and attend in-service training, workshops, and conferences. PBIS training materials address student behavior and guide staff through the process of designing a schoolwide discipline plan. The trainings guide teachers to improve their classroom management plans and tailor strategies to increase motivation and improve behavior (NREPP 2011).

"Within 1 year of implementation in 10 schools," notes Andria Amador, director of behavioral health at Boston Public Schools, "we've seen an improvement in social behaviors and a decrease in problem behaviors. We are excited about the potential for further improvement in additional schools."

A Framework for Improving Behavior

The PBIS framework, which dates to the late 1990s, is an evidence-based model of proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to promote positive school environments and reduce youth violence (Ward 2010). It is data driven, prevention based, and implemented through a layered continuum of practices and systems (Sugai et al. 2011). The goals of the PBIS framework are to improve conditions for learning, to decrease violent youth behaviors,



'Some Want to Be Interrupted, Some Don't'

All five Violence Interrupters have lived in the Mattapan neighborhood, and two still do. They each work shifts from noon to 8:00 p.m. each day, excluding Sundays, and coordinate with police to stop violence before it happens. Their job is to identify those at high risk of becoming shooters. Their work with gang decision-makers is critical. "But some of them want to be interrupted, and some don't," says Shawn Webb, who is the Youth Services Unit manager for the city and supervisor to some of the Violence Interrupters.

Webb adds: "While they work with police, and relations are good, they do not cross a line that would make it unsafe for a gang member to be seen talking to an interrupter." This interruption strategy relies on mutual trust.

In 3 Years: Results

From year end 2010 to year end 2013, Mattapan saw a 23.4 percent decrease in total part 1 crime, thanks in no small part to the Violence Interrupters.

"The Violence Interrupters are doing a wonderful job in Mattapan," says Boston Police Commissioner William Evans. "They are focused on the right individuals and are making strong connections with them to steer them away from gun violence. Together with our many partner agencies and the community, the Violence Interrupters are making a real difference in our citywide strategy to prevent and reduce youth violence."

Options, Not Advice

Arthur, 35, is one of the Violence Interrupters who still lives in Mattapan. He notes that his personal and professional life merge as he guides and directs those in need of care and compassion. He seeks out people who are isolated. When he and his fellow interrupters see an individual in such circumstances, they know one thing: No one wants to be isolated.

"We are not coddling people," says Arthur. "We are giving them options so that they can make better choices. They prefer options and choices to advice."

and to enhance relationships between and among leaders in juvenile justice, education, and the community, using systemic supports that enable accurate, durable, and scalable implementation (Fixsen et al. 2005).



PBIS works from the premise that respect, attention, acknowledgment, and praise coax the best from students.

PBIS addresses disruptive behavior with the following components (Sugai et al. 2011):

1. A schoolwide curriculum that emphasizes targeted social skills instruction
2. Positive school and classroom social cultures where teaching and learning are emphasized
3. Challenging and engaging instructional practices that maximize academic success for all students
4. Continual, positive, and active supervision and monitoring of student behavior and learning
5. Regular, frequent, and positive acknowledgments and reinforcement of student success
6. Active involvement of all students and family, faculty, and community members
7. Multiyear and multicomponent approaches to implementation
8. Adults who model the same positive social behaviors and values expected of students

Forum Adopts PBIS

The Forum operates on the premise that youth and gang violence in communities can be more effectively addressed through comprehensive planning and coordination. The PBIS framework is based on the same spirit of coordination and overlaps significantly with Forum areas of emphasis. The Technical Assistance Center on PBIS, initially funded in 1998, is a program of the Education Department's Office of Special Education Programs. Its coordination with the Forum builds on shared goals of preventing youth

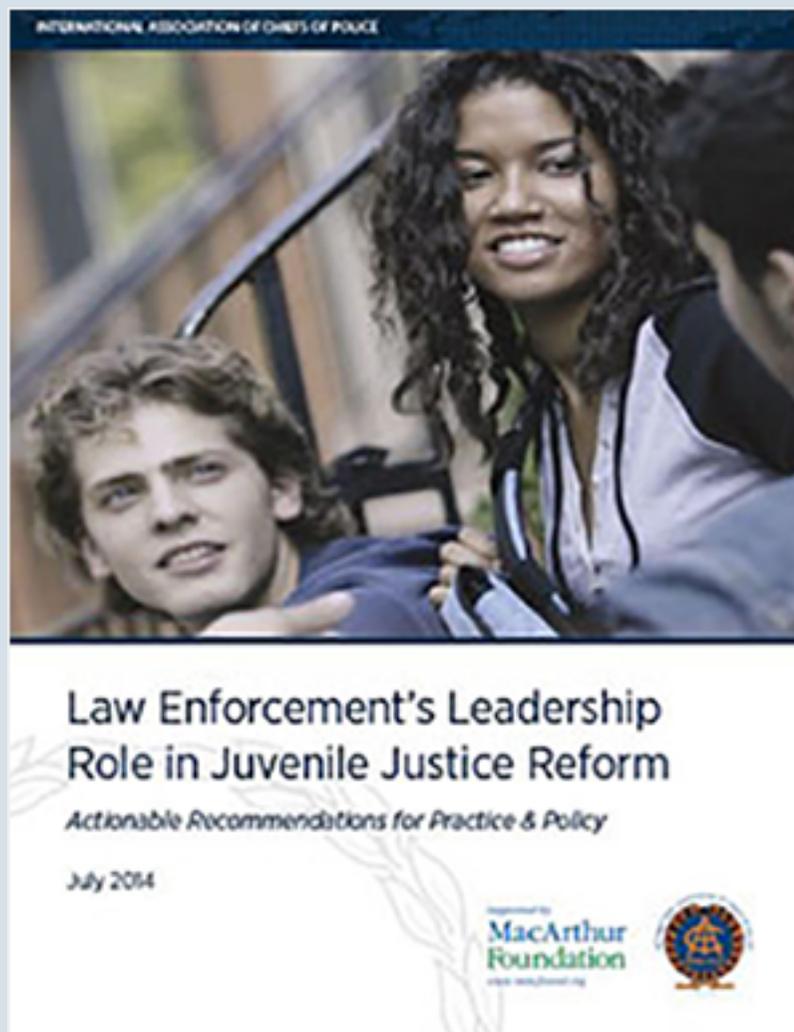
'How Could It Have Been Prevented?'

By Arthur's estimate, 97 percent of the violence in Mattapan used to be the outgrowth of a single murder in the early 1990s that turned into a feud between two extended families and carried on throughout the decade. Even today, by Arthur's reckoning, 7 percent of the violence in the neighborhood can be traced to that feud. Murder is ineradicable.

What is the ultimate goal of the interrupters? To interrupt youths and young adults from committing murders and keep them from spending the rest of their lives wishing they could take back 3 seconds—the 3 seconds when they took a life.

NEWS & VIEWS

Reports



violence with evidence-based practices, increasing awareness about youth and gang violence, and jointly building local capacity for solutions.

Grants Boost Forum Cities' Resources

Boston, Mass.; Camden, N.J.; Chicago, Ill.; Detroit, Mich.; Memphis, Tenn.; Minneapolis, Minn.; New Orleans, La.; Philadelphia, Pa.; and Salinas and San Jose, Calif., have been working to prevent youth violence across the spectrum. These 10 Forum cities were awarded initial 12-month grants in 2013 from the Education Department's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education to improve or expand use of a schoolwide PBIS framework. The grants are intended to supplement U.S. Department of Justice capacity-building grants to help meet funding goals for PBIS development. With additional 6-month grants, each city is now receiving technical assistance to fully implement PBIS in schools with high suspension and violent incident rates.

This funding, in conjunction with Technical Assistance Center cooperation, is expected to support positive student behaviors and reduce factors that contribute to youth violence in higher-risk communities. Districts such as Camden City Public Schools have used the grants to establish and train PBIS support teams and pilot projects so the schools can follow the PBIS model. In Philadelphia, "Anything we can do that prevents disciplinary actions and suspensions, and, most important, keeps students in the classroom is a win," said Pennsylvania U.S. Congressman Chaka Fattah, in a prepared statement when the grants were announced. "I am happy this funding will allow the School District to grow this program into two additional high need schools."

PBIS Can Reduce Violent Behaviors

PBIS is a route to preventing upsurges in student behaviors mentioned in news media, such as violence against teachers or other students, theft, bullying, and drug use. Research demonstrates that efforts to prevent these serious problems are more successful if schools support the adoption and use of evidence-based practices (Ward 2010).

As a results-based accountability system that shares and uses data to strengthen service delivery, PBIS echoes the Forum's research-based strategies of prevention, intervention, enforcement, and reentry. It also promotes

Chiefs of Police Release 33 Recommendations From Juvenile Justice National Summit

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) has released [*Law Enforcement's Leadership Role in Juvenile Justice Reform: Actionable Recommendations for Practice & Policy*](#). The report sets forth 33 recommendations for law enforcement and juvenile justice stakeholders to address juvenile crime and develop more effective, developmentally appropriate responses to juvenile offenders and at-risk youths. It results from the National Summit on Law Enforcement Leadership in Juvenile Justice, which IACP convened in September 2013 with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

"This report is a useful resource for the federal government and for jurisdictions nationwide," Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Administrator Robert L. Listenbee said in a statement. "As we work to make our justice system more fair and equitable, the science is beginning to tell us that, whether it's the way a law enforcement officer approaches a kid on the street, or the way a judge talks to a young person in the courtroom, nuances can make a big difference in whether children decide to get back on track or whether they decide to continue their antisocial behaviors."

The 33 recommendations are divided into eight thematic areas:

1. Making juvenile justice a priority within law enforcement agencies
2. Building partnerships among law enforcement, youth and families
3. Collaboration and information sharing
4. Promoting alternatives to arrest, court referral, and detention
5. Data collection and expanding evidence-based and promising initiatives
6. Pathways to school completion
7. Responding to youth with behavioral health conditions and trauma histories
8. Amplifying law enforcement's advocacy on juvenile justice reform

Interagency Forum Reports on Well-Being of Nation's 18- to 24-Year-Olds

The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics released [*America's Young Adults: Special Issue, 2014*](#). The 100-page report includes data about 18- to 24-year-old men and women from nationally representative, federally sponsored surveys. The data are summarized under five key themes: education; economic circumstances; family formation; civic, social, and personal behavior; and health and safety.

conditions that discourage youth crime and violence in communities, through mentorship and other youth development opportunities, and seeks to improve school cultures, increase social competence, prevent violence and illegal drug use, and improve overall academic success.

From 1,500 Discipline Referrals to Self-Respect and Respect for Others

George Sugai, Technical Assistance Center co-director and education professor at the University of Connecticut, has observed the results of PBIS implementation at many school sites around the country. Dr. Sugai describes a middle school of 750 students that struggled with a negative school climate "driven by a cycle of problem student behavior, reactive discipline, more problem behavior, and more reactive discipline." In 1 school year, students received more than 1,500 office discipline referrals for major rule-violating behaviors.

In an attempt to shift to a more positive school climate, the school formed a team of principals, teachers, school staff, students, and parents. For the first month of school, the team taught students daily to "respect self, respect others, and respect environment," with specific examples. Each day, school staff recognized many students who displayed those expected behaviors and, Sugai adds, "gave them direct and immediate acknowledging feedback to express their appreciation for their contributions toward a positive school climate."

This PBIS-based team effort succeeded in reducing violations in the first year, reducing the number of major rule-violating behaviors to fewer than 700. Students with repeated problem behaviors were supported by a special behavior. "Although a lasting change in school climate usually takes 2 to 3 years to establish," Sugai says, "teachers, students, and parents uniformly agreed that their school climate had dramatically improved in the first year, and teaching and learning were much easier to achieve."

Teaching the Teachers

"What is equally important to what we do with students is what we do to develop and support the implementation skills of educators," adds Sugai. For example, "teaching social skills is a relatively easy process, but developing fluent, authentic, and effective implementation is more challenging. If done well, the

Some findings from the report:

- In 2012, 65 percent of young Americans participated in the labor force, compared with the peak rate of 75 percent in 1986 and 74 percent in 2000.
- In the 2012 presidential election year, 38 percent of young Americans voted, compared with 20 percent in the 2010 congressional election year.
- In 2012, 20 percent of young men and 15 percent of young women smoked cigarettes. However, young white adults were still more than twice as likely to smoke as young Hispanic and African American adults.
- Among 18- to 24-year-old Hispanic Americans, college enrollment increased from 21.7 percent in 2000 to 37.5 percent in 2012, the largest increase among all racial and ethnic groups.
- The overall college enrollment rate for 18- to 24-year-olds increased from 26 percent in 1980 to 41 percent in 2012.
- Continuing a trend since the early 1990s, females are enrolling in college in greater percentages than males. In 2012, 44.5 percent of females were enrolled in college compared with 37.6 percent of males.
- In 2013, 58 percent of young men and 51 percent of young women lived with their parents.
- In 2012, young American women were giving birth at historic lows. The birth rate for women ages 18–19 was 51.4 per 1,000 in 2012, down from 94.0 per 1,000 in 1991. The birth rate for women ages 20–24 fell from 116.5 per 1,000 in 1990 to 83.1 per 1,000 in 2012.
- Obesity increased among young Americans between 1988–94 and 1999–2002. But between 1999–2002 and 2007–10, the rate of obesity did not change significantly. Between 2007 and 2010, young women (27 percent) were more likely to be obese than young men (19 percent).

Few Programs Concentrating on Early Childhood Reduce Offending in Early Adulthood

Only a few programs that focus on early childhood have been proven to make an impact on reducing criminal behavior in early adulthood, according to "[Changing Lives: Prevention and Intervention to Reduce Serious Offending](#)," a *Justice Research* bulletin published this month jointly by the National Institute of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

The eight-page report synthesizes the highest-quality evaluation studies and research reviews (grouped by program concentration), to assess early childhood, juvenile, and early adulthood programs that have made demonstrated impacts on offending up to age 29.

While casting doubt on all but a few programs, the finding underscores the utility of OJJDP's [Model Programs Guide](#) and [CrimeSolutions.gov](#), two databases of evidence-based programs.

Second Volume in School Safety Series Released

improvement of child behavior follows."

PBIS is not a top-down approach but rather a horizontal framework that grows by involving school communities with evidence-based methods and broad participation. Schools engage students directly by providing them with feedback on the accuracy and use of their social skills and behaviors.

Beyond the evidence and training that occurs in PBIS settings, Sugai imagined how successful PBIS implementation and reduced youth violence indicators might look in a school. "Visitors are likely to see school staff members engaging in behaviors that collectively would be described as a 'positive school climate,'" Sugai says.

In PBIS classrooms and schoolwide settings, school staff members are engaging in activities that have been shown to reduce violent behaviors and increase the ability of students to participate safely at school, at home, and in their communities (Ward 2010; Barnoski 2001).

Evidence supports that PBIS has reduced major disciplinary infractions and incidences of aggression and other problem behaviors, improved academic achievement, enhanced perception of organizational health and safety, reduced teaching reports of bullying behavior and peer rejection, and enhanced overall improvement in school climate (Sugai 2011).

"PBIS is a marriage of behavioral theory, behavior analysis, positive behavior supports, and prevention and implementation science," Sugai says. Through implementation of the PBIS framework, Forum city schools and communities will no doubt continue to see improvement in youth violence prevention efforts.

For more information on PBIS, [visit the Web site](#).

ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPCOMING EVENTS

Training Opportunities

Webinar: What 'High Risk, High Need' Means for Family Drug Courts

The National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center has released [Sharing Ideas and Resources to Keep Our Nation's Schools Safe](#), the second volume in the center's school safety series. The 82-page report discusses school safety–related programs from federal agencies such as the FBI and the U.S. Department of Education, efforts at the state level, and cooperative efforts in local communities.

The series stems from a National Institute of Justice project but is not published by the U.S. Department of Justice.

News

Nearly 20 Percent of College Women Victimized by Sexual Assault

Nearly one U.S. college woman in five is the victim of some form sexual assault during her time as an undergraduate student, the National Institute of Justice recently reported.

Juvenile Justice Resource Hub Adds Evidence-Based Practices Section

The Juvenile Justice Resource Hub just added a section on evidence-based practices that features model policies and recent research, and provides links to resources and experts. Developed by the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange and the National Juvenile Justice Network with support from the MacArthur Foundation, the Juvenile Justice Resource Hub offers recent in-depth information on juvenile justice issues and trends.

Other Resources

APA's Race, Racism, and Law Enforcement Blog

In light of the fatal shooting of an unarmed man this month in Ferguson, Mo., and the strong public reaction to it, the directorate at the American Psychological Association (APA)—the Public Interest—is putting together a *Race, Racism, and Law Enforcement* blog series produced by psychologists.

The psychologists are experts on issues related to trust, anger, leadership, race, bias and discrimination, young men of color, community violence, and community relationships with police. The first post in the APA blog is ["Teachable Moments About Policing From Ferguson, Mo.,"](#) by Tom Tyler, professor of law and psychology at Yale Law School.

Model Programs Guide Adds Three New Literature Reviews

OJJDP's [Model Programs Guide \(the MPG\)](#) has recently added three new literature reviews on current juvenile justice topics:

- Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children/Sex Trafficking
- LGBTQ Youths in the Juvenile Justice System
- Alternatives to Detention and Confinement

The literature reviews provide summaries of relevant research and evaluations on juvenile justice–related topics

One of the most important decisions each Family Drug Court makes is to determine its target population and what resources are needed to serve them. What criteria should drive these decisions? A significant amount of research in the adult criminal drug court setting has addressed eligibility criteria and which populations these programs can serve most effectively—namely high-risk, high-need offenders. This free Webinar—led by Children and Family Futures, on Sept. 18, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. PDT—will explore the "high-risk, high-need" principle and how this applies to family drug courts. [Register here.](#)

Partnerships for Safe Schools Free Training in Biloxi

Law enforcement officers, school safety officials, and juvenile justice stakeholders are invited to attend a free 2-day Partnerships for Safe Schools training workshop, to be held Sept. 30 and Oct. 1, 2014, in Biloxi, Miss. The course is designed to prepare school safety team members to implement or strengthen school safety plans that enhance the protection of students, teachers, and the surrounding community. The course is targeted to multiagency school safety teams [Register by Sept. 15 here.](#)

Global Youth Justice Training Institute

The [10th Global Youth Justice Training Institute](#) will be held on Dec. 2–4 in Las Vegas, Nev. Participants will learn strategies for establishing or enhancing local youth justice diversion programs through teen, student, youth, and peer courts and juries. The program will address a variety of topics, from training youth and adult volunteers to grant writing and funding opportunities.

and program types. The *MPG* currently includes [literature reviews on 40 topic areas](#). These reviews are an ideal starting point for anyone new to a topic or for those who wish to learn about recent developments in the field.

The *MPG* contains information about evidence-based juvenile justice and youth prevention, intervention, and reentry programs. It is a resource for practitioners and communities about what works, what is promising, and what does not work in juvenile justice, delinquency prevention, and child protection and safety. In addition to providing literature reviews, the *MPG* contains useful program profiles, implementation information, and links to additional resources that practitioners, policymakers, and communities can use to improve the effectiveness of interventions, to enhance accountability, to ensure public safety, and to reduce recidivism. The tools provided on the *MPG* are specifically designed for juvenile justice-oriented practitioners and policymakers.

Smartphone App to Prevent Bullying Launched

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and StopBullying.gov have launched *KnowBullying*, a free smartphone app for parents, educators, and others who wish to talk to kids about bullying. The application, which you can [find here](#), explains

- How to recognize whether bullying is affecting a child
- How and when to talk with children about bullying
- How to start a conversation with a child about bullying
- Educator-oriented strategies for preventing bullying in the classroom and supporting pupils who are being bullied

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