

School Violence Linked to Student Transfers

Research published in November 2020 by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) says that student exposure to violent crime at urban elementary schools can be linked to higher transfer rates, and that students from wealthier families or safer neighborhoods are more likely to leave a school due to violence than their less-advantaged peers.

“Our findings offer evidence that school instability is related to high levels of urban violence, and that the effects of violence are more widespread than just the impact on victims, witnesses, or perpetrators,” said Julia Burdick-Will, assistant professor of sociology and education at Johns Hopkins University, in a release. “Changing schools is stressful and often harmful to learning under the best of circumstances, and when motivated by safety concerns, might be even more difficult for students.”

Drawing a Connection

Conducted by Burdick-Will, Kiara Millay Nerenberg, and Jeffrey Grigg at Johns Hopkins University with Faith Connolly at McREL International, the study analyzed student data from Baltimore City Public Elementary Schools alongside crime data from the Baltimore Police Department for academic years 2010–2011 through 2015–2016. The study compared reported incidents of violent crime that occurred on school grounds or the streets immediately surrounding a school between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. on weekdays during the academic year and the likelihood of students transferring to another school the following summer.

The study found that the average student was 4 percent more likely to transfer schools when incidents of violent crime at or in close proximity to a school during the year doubled



from the previous year. Students ineligible to receive free or reduced-priced meals and those from the safest 10 percent of neighborhoods in a district were 11 percent more likely to transfer, while students from the most violent neighborhoods were less than 2 percent more likely to leave.

“This suggests that more advantaged students are more sensitive to exposure to violence at school and are more able to respond to changes in school violence because of greater access to social and economic resources,” Burdick-Will said. Students without the same resources are “likely to feel unsafe and want to change schools but are unable to do so. These students are at a substantial disadvantage, given the negative effect of violence exposure on cognitive functioning and learning.”

Widespread Violence

Baltimore’s 129 public elementary schools reported an average of about eight violent crimes per school year, although a few schools reported more than 50 violent crimes in a single year. Most schools didn’t report any of the most serious types of crimes, but a few reported multiple homicides, rapes, or

shootings in close proximity in a single year. The authors caution that violent crime rates can fluctuate dramatically, and one year is not necessarily predictive of the next.

An estimated 665 students changed schools during the study period, with the average elementary school expecting 1.5 student transfers per year. With school funding depending on the number of students in a school, such fluctuations can lead to budgetary implications. “The loss of a few students can lead to reduced staff and program cuts,” Burdick-Will said.

Creating school safety zones can have benefits, the study suggests. “Students are much more sensitive to what happens on school grounds or on the streets immediately surrounding the school,” Burdick-Will said. “This means that creating a safe school environment could reduce violence-related transfers. By focusing on providing a safe zone immediately around a school, administrators and policymakers can potentially increase stability in enrollment patterns.”

To download the report, visit bit.ly/2VfZ6CA.

State Policies Promote Principal Quality

Georgia's revised state standards for principals have been effective in promoting principal quality, according to a RAND Corporation report commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, and other state-level policy "levers" can work if supported.

"Using State-Level Policy Levers to Promote Principal Quality: Lessons From Seven States Partnering With Principal Preparation Programs and Districts" surveys the seven participating states in Wallace's University Principal Preparation Initiative (UPPI)—California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Virginia—to find out what's working.

Drawing on previous research, the study identifies seven levers states are using: job standards, recruitment of people with leadership promise, principal preparation program oversight, principal licensure, principal evaluation, professional development, and use of "leader tracking systems" that capture longitudinal data about the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of aspiring and current school leaders.

Representatives of state government, districts, nonprofits, and other entities in all seven states agreed that the "standards" lever was used effectively to promote principal quality. Stakeholders in a majority of the states felt that the "program approval" and "principal licensure" levers were also used effectively.

The report details the challenges states face in using such levers, as well as several recommendations for effectuating change:

- **When setting policy priorities to improve principal quality, consider the mix of policy options available.** States should consider whether there are ways to leverage or enhance existing mandates by linking them more strongly to principal standards and one another. Consistent, aligned use of different levers can promote a coherent state strategy.
- **Identify opportunities to build stakeholder engagement and state-level expertise on principal quality.** Stakeholder engagement is central to many of the examples of successful policy implementation and policy change. Stakeholder groups can be leveraged in a variety of ways to expand a state's capacity.
- **When using state mandates to drive principal quality, couple them with information, resources, and supports.** Mandates regarding licensure, evaluation, and program approval requirements can be a powerful way to drive improvement in principal quality, but coupling mandates with capacity-boosting resources and information can increase the odds of success.
- **Be opportunistic: Link principal initiatives to key state education priorities, and build on related initiatives.** Rather than design a proposal from the ground up, stakeholders should scan the state landscape for significant policy efforts focused on teachers and consider whether—and how—a similar effort might be developed and implemented with a focus on principals.

To read the full report, visit bit.ly/2JtYk21.

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Fordham Study Says Social Studies Improve Reading Comprehension

Elementary schools should spend more time teaching social studies rather than “doubling down” on reading comprehension, says a study released in September 2020 by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an education reform think tank. Echoing insights that E.D. Hirsch set forth in his 1987 book *Cultural Literacy*, the study says that when readers have existing background knowledge, language comprehension comes more easily.

Led by Fordham associate director of research Adam Tyner and early childhood researcher Sarah Kabourek, “Social Studies Instruction and Reading Comprehension: Evidence From the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study” looks at data from the federal “Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–2011” to determine how class time is spent in U.S. elementary schools and how it might be better used to promote literacy.

Their findings:

- Elementary school students in the U.S. spend more time on ELA than on any other subject.
- Increased instructional time for social studies—not ELA—is associated with greater progress in reading.
- The students who benefit most from additional social studies time are girls and those from lower-income and/or non-English-speaking homes.

The authors offer three takeaways: First, elementary schools should make more room for high-quality instruction in history, civics, geography, and the other subjects that comprise social studies. Second, teachers should use



ELA blocks to build student knowledge, ideally by adopting a well-regarded, knowledge-rich, prepackaged curriculum. Finally, administrators should align reading assessments with curricular content.

“Spending so much time on the ‘skill’ of reading comprehension at the expense of content might sound like a good idea, but it actually works against the outcomes most schools hope to achieve,” the study concludes.

To access the report, visit bit.ly/36hWRVK.

Remote Instruction Requires Support, Survey Says

Teachers providing fully remote instruction in the first half of the school year said they needed additional supports from school and district leaders, according to “Will This School Year Be Another Casualty of the Pandemic?”, a report released in November 2020 by the RAND Corporation based on the American Educator Panels Fall 2020 COVID-19 Survey.

Many teaching in fully remote environments said that they had a “major” or “very major” need for strategies to keep students engaged and motivated (39 percent) and help students catch up to grade level (40 percent). Principals in fully remote schools also reported a greater need for supports than principals of schools offering in-person instruction, with about half (49 percent) saying they needed

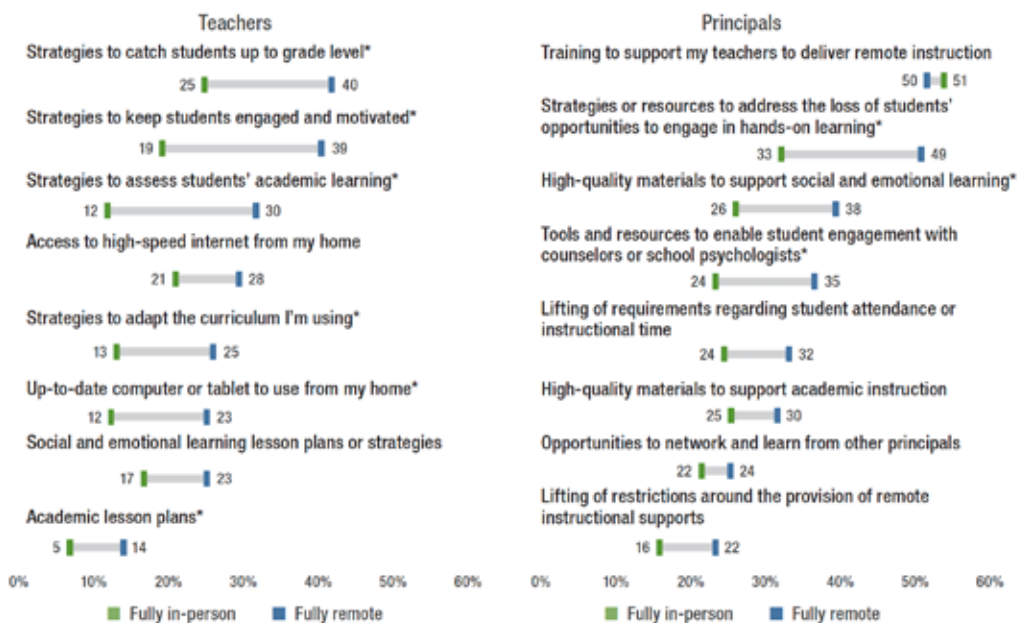
resources to help students address lost hands-on learning opportunities.

“Our findings paint an alarming picture of how the 2020–2021 school year is unfolding,” the report says. “Even though teachers are working more hours than they were before the pandemic, students are likely not getting all the curriculum content and instruction that they would have received during a normal school year.”

To download the full report, visit bit.ly/2KTRVX.

Need for Supports Was Higher Among Remote-Only Teachers and Principals

Percentage Reporting Major or Very Major Needs



NOTE: This figure is based on the following survey question asked to teachers and principals: “Please indicate your current level of need for additional support from school or district leaders in each of the following areas.” Response options were “no need,” “very minor need,” “minor need,” “moderate need,” “major need,” and “very major need.” * indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between educators in schools providing in-person instruction and educators providing fully remote instruction.

Source: RAND Corporation