



For Immediate Release
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Contact:
Brett Naftzger, Community Matters,
310-452-5826 OR
Monica Carazo, LAUSD,
213-241-6766

Grants Awarded to 12 LAUSD Schools for Violence Prevention

Los Angeles- With the support of the Annenberg Foundation, 12 additional schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District will be implementing the Safe School Ambassadors program (SSA) with the goal of reducing youth violence and creating safer school climates. The first training was held in December at 153rd Street Elementary School. Eleven trainings will be conducted throughout January.

In addition, four LAUSD schools with existing SSA programs will expand their program thanks to a grant from Kaiser Permanente South. Kaiser Permanente South has been supporting the implementation of SSA in the District since 2005.

During the two-day training conducted by the non-profit organization Community Matters, students are empowered and equipped with nonviolent communication skills to prevent and stop mistreatment, cruelty and violence among their peers.

Far too many students don't feel welcome, safe or included at school. According to a national study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 75 percent of students say that they have been bullied at school. In addition, *every day*, an estimated 160,000 students stay home from school across the nation due to fear of attack or intimidation.

This bullying is getting younger, meaner, and more difficult to identify than ever before due to access to technology such as MySpace, cell phones, and YouTube. Perhaps most disturbing is that bullying and harassment are also becoming more acceptable among young people. Research shows that 70-85 percent of students have been passive bystanders to peer mistreatment. Their silence amounts to tacit consent, which further reinforces an environment of bullying and mistreatment.

“Students see, hear, and know what adults don't. They can intervene in ways adults can't, but usually don't,” said Rick Phillips, Executive Director of Community Matters and co-founder of the Safe School Ambassadors program. “They often fear retaliation or simply don't know what to do.”

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The Safe School Ambassadors program removes these obstacles by very carefully identifying and selecting socially-influential “opinion leaders” from the diverse cliques and groups at school. These students are trained in nonviolent intervention and communication skills such as reasoning with their friends to avoid or stop cruelty and violence. The program is sustained by utilizing regularly-scheduled, small group meetings, in which Ambassadors strengthen their skills, share their experiences, and record their interventions.

“We see this program as a valuable resource to enhance our existing efforts to improve school climate, attendance and academic performance.” said David Holmquist, LAUSD Chief Operating Officer. “We are grateful to the Annenberg Foundation and Kaiser Permanente South for making this possible.”

Community Matters received a first-time grant of \$101,750 from the Annenberg Foundation to implement the SSA program in Los Angeles county schools during the 2008-2009 school year. In addition to the 12 LAUSD schools that have been funded, four schools in Los Angeles County will also receive a grant to implement the program.

Safe School Ambassadors is a program of Community Matters, a nonprofit organization that specializes in: youth violence prevention, youth development, and sustainable school and community partnerships. Headquartered in Sebastopol, California, with a satellite office in Los Angeles, Community Matters has been in operation since 1995. For more information, visit www.community-matters.org or www.safeschoolambassadors.org.

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