

**EVERY DAY IN AMERICA, THOUSANDS OF COURAGEOUS YOUNG PEOPLE  
ARE STANDING UP TO CRUELTY, BULLYING AND VIOLENCE**

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### **The Safe School Ambassadors® (SSA) program**

The Safe School Ambassadors® (SSA) program was developed in 2000 to help prevent and stop peer mistreatment and violence among 4th- to 12th-grade students. Since then, approximately **60,000** students and **5,000** adults have been trained at **900** public and private schools in **28** states and **2** Canada provinces.

Following the tragic event at Columbine High School, schools disproportionately focused on school safety from the “outside-in,” installing airport-like security: locks, fences, metal detectors and security cameras. They largely ignored the role that students can play in reducing violence and mistreatment.

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### **Program Strategy**

The SSA program provides an “inside-out” approach which harnesses student power to change their school culture and climate from within; this strategy allows them to be a critical part of the solution to stop bullying and violence. Students see, hear and know things adults don't. They are typically the first responders on the scene of mistreatment and violence, and can intervene in ways adults can't. While adults may make and enforce the rules at school, students create and maintain the social norms that allow peer mistreatment to happen.

Research shows that 70-85% of students have been passive bystanders to peer mistreatment. Most often, they do not intervene because they fear retaliation or don't know what to do or say. Their silence amounts to tacit consent, which reinforces an environment where it's 'cool to be cruel'. SSA trainings mobilize the bystanders, but not just any bystanders. Socially-influential, opinion leaders (the students who shape the school's norms) from the diverse groups and cliques on campus are carefully identified and chosen by both the school faculty and their peers. They are trained to use powerful nonviolent communication and intervention skills to prevent, deescalate and stop mistreatment among their peers. It is with their peers that they can be safe, cool, and effective. The SSA program is sustained through regularly-scheduled, small group meetings with trained adult facilitators, in which Ambassadors strengthen their skills, share their experiences, and document their interventions.

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### **Proven Results**

As a result of having implemented the SSA program, schools report a reduction in violence, suspensions, mistreatment and tension among students. Schools also report improvements in social-emotional climate, where respect is the norm, students feel welcome, safe, and included, and they can focus on learning. *“Because of the initial success of the Safe School Ambassadors program, we participated in a second training in October of 2010 to add more students to the SSA Initiative. The 49% decrease in our discipline referrals also carries over to reductions in our expulsion, and suspension rates for the 2009-2010 school year,”* stated Stephanie Smith, Principal of Seaford Middle School in Delaware.