



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

February 28, 2013

Dear Chief State School Officers,

President Obama has proclaimed February 2013 National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month.<sup>1</sup> This proclamation is the latest in a series of efforts by the Administration to create safer communities for young women by raising public awareness of gender-based violence, educating communities about how violence affects women and youths, and encouraging new efforts to prevent and respond to violence. At the same time, we recognize that gender-based violence affects boys and girls of all ages (from every socioeconomic group, race, religion, and sexual orientation; in all regions of the country; and in schools of every type), and its consequences can be significant for victims and their communities. As educators and administrators, you play an important role in protecting your students from victimization and its long-lasting effects on health and life outcomes. I want to inform you of the Department's recent efforts to support you and your school communities in preventing teen dating violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence may include, but is not limited to, sexual assault, intimate partner or teen dating violence, and stalking. Gender-based violence may also include other behaviors that degrade and harm children and youths, such as human trafficking.

While these forms of violence can affect any member of the school community, girls typically face disproportionate rates of victimization, and that victimization can begin very early.<sup>2</sup> Many types of gender-based violence occur as early as elementary school.<sup>3</sup> Of those who have ever experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner, about 1 in 5 women and nearly 1 in 7 men were first victimized between 11 and 17 years of age.<sup>4</sup>

Gender-based violence has serious consequences for victims and their schools. Witnessing violence has been associated with decreased school attendance and academic performance.<sup>5</sup> Further, teenage victims of physical dating violence are more likely than their non-abused peers to smoke, use drugs, engage in unhealthy dieting (e.g., taking diet pills or laxatives, vomiting to

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<sup>1</sup> Presidential Proclamation – National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month, 2013. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House. [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/31/presidential-proclamation-national-teen-dating-violence-awareness-and-pr](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/31/presidential-proclamation-national-teen-dating-violence-awareness-and-pr).

<sup>2</sup> Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. 2011. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Eaton, D.K., Davis, K.S., Barrios, L., Brener, N.D., & Noonan, R.K. 2007. Associations of dating violence victimization with lifetime participation, co-occurrence, and early initiation of risk behaviors among U.S. high school students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 22: 585–602.

lose weight), engage in risky sexual behaviors, and attempt or consider suicide.<sup>6</sup> Sex trafficking has devastating consequences for minors, including long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease (including HIV/AIDS), drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism, and even death.<sup>7</sup> Although all victims of gender-based violence are affected negatively, research reveals that female victims of dating violence often experience more severe and longer-lasting consequences than do male victims.<sup>8,9</sup>

Research shows that schools can make a difference in preventing teen violence and other forms of gender-based violence.<sup>10</sup> As with most of the risk factors threatening the health and safety of our students, we should work to create safe school climates by strengthening students' social and emotional skills, by developing educator capacity to engage students and families, and by implementing multitiered behavioral supports.<sup>11</sup> However, such efforts are only the first step in preventing gender-based violence. Schools should educate their communities about prevention and identification, and develop locally tailored responses to address incidences of teen dating violence, stalking, sexual assault, and trafficking. Without a comprehensive approach that takes into account the unique challenges that these offenses present (e.g., victim reluctance to report, trauma from sexual violence), we will not be successful in reducing the number of school-aged victims, in providing effective support to traumatized youths, or in addressing the behavior and needs of perpetrators.

I urge you to take action and consider how your school community will reduce gender-based violence. Enclosed is the *What Schools Can Do* brief, which provides you with simple activities and resources to help you reduce gender-based violence and its consequences. Included are sample definitions of behaviors associated with gender-based violence that may be helpful to you and your community in understanding this critically important issue. Further, the Department's National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments recently released a new teen dating violence training module – *Get Smart, Get Help, Get Safe*<sup>12</sup> – to build the capacity of specialized instructional support personnel to develop comprehensive school policies regarding teen dating violence, and to identify and respond appropriately to signs of abuse.

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<sup>6</sup> Silverman, J.G., Raj, A., Mucci, L.A., & Hathaway, J.E. 2001. Dating violence against adolescent girls and associated substance use, unhealthy weight control, sexual risk behavior, pregnancy, and suicidality. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 286 (5): 572-579.

<sup>7</sup> Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. 2013. What is modern slavery? U.S. Department of State. [www.state.gov/j/tip/what/index.htm](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/what/index.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Ackard, D.M., M.E. Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, D. 2007. Long-term impact of adolescent dating violence on the behavioral and psychological health of male and female youth. *Journal of Pediatrics* 151 (5): 476-481.

<sup>9</sup> NISVS: 2010 Summary Report.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, B., Stein, N.D., Woods, D., Mumford, E. 2011. Shifting Boundaries: Final Report on an Experimental Evaluation of a Youth Dating Violence Program in New York City Middle Schools. U.S. Department of Justice. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/236175.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> For Federal assistance regarding multitiered behavioral supports, please see the Office of Special Education Programs' Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ([www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)) and the National Center on Response to Intervention ([www.rti4success.org](http://www.rti4success.org)).

<sup>12</sup> For more information about *Get Smart, Get Help, Get Safe*, please see the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments at <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/index.php?id=1511>.

I look forward to continuing our work together to promote safe and respectful schools for America's students.

Sincerely,

/s/

Arne Duncan



## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AMONG SCHOOL-AGED YOUTHS WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

### 1. COMMUNICATE THE ISSUE

Raise awareness about the problem of gender-based violence by developing an information campaign for students, faculty, and parents.

#### *Helpful Hints and Resources:*

- Understanding Teen Dating Violence is a basic fact sheet by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that outlines the behaviors and risks associated with teen dating violence, and the preventative measures that communities can take:  
[www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/TeenDatingViolence2012-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/TeenDatingViolence2012-a.pdf).
- Dating Matters is a free, online course that is available to educators, school personnel, and others working to improve the health of teens. Dating Matters helps educators identify the risk factors and warning signs of dating violence. Educators receive continuing education units (CEUs) for completing this 60-minute training developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
[www.yetoviolence.org/datingmatters/](http://www.yetoviolence.org/datingmatters/).
- The video Break the Silence: Stop the Violence shows parents talking with teens about developing healthy, respectful relationships before they start dating:  
[www.cdc.gov/CDCTV/BreakTheSilence/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/CDCTV/BreakTheSilence/index.html).

### 2. EDUCATE STUDENTS AND STAFF<sup>1</sup>

Provide training to students and staff on the behaviors of victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence, how to respond when incidents occur, and the resources that are available for those who have been victimized. Consider how such training can be integrated into the schools' broader efforts to create a positive school climate, and delivered as part of a multitiered framework<sup>2</sup> for supporting positive student behavior.

#### *Helpful Hints and Resources:*

- Get Smart, Get Help, Get Safe is a free "train the trainer" module designed to help school counselors and school psychologists prevent teen dating violence in schools:  
<http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/index.php?id=1511>.
- See the Department of Education's fact sheet, Human Trafficking of Children in the United States: A Fact Sheet for Schools, for resources on preventing commercial sexual exploitation of children:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/osh/tipfactsheet1813.pdf>.
- Consider implementing an evidence-based curriculum focused on healthy relationship promotion and gender-based violence prevention. You can learn more about various curricula by reviewing a PowerPoint presentation given by the Department of Education in 2010:  
[www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/dvpwebinar.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/dvpwebinar.pdf).

<sup>1</sup> Research shows that interventions intended to reduce bullying may be inadequate or inappropriate to fully address gender-based violence. For that reason, educators and school administrators should learn more about gender-based violence, and how to respond appropriately, in order to ensure that the school community is working effectively to safeguard students. (Gruber, J.E., & Fineran, S. 2008. Comparing the impact of bullying and sexual harassment victimization on the mental and physical health of adolescents. *Sex Roles* 59: 1-13.)

<sup>2</sup> For Federal assistance regarding multitiered behavioral supports, please see the Office of Special Education Programs' Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ([www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)) and the National Center on Response to Intervention ([www.rti4success.org/](http://www.rti4success.org/)).

### 3. REVIEW POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Review current school policies and procedures governing student and faculty behavior – particularly protocols for intervention, reporting, and providing victim assistance – to ensure that they specifically address sexual assault, stalking, and intimate partner violence.

#### *Helpful Hints and Resources:*

- *Review school policies and procedures for compliance with existing State and local laws and policies and Title IX grievance procedure requirements. As part of a district's obligation under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972<sup>3</sup> to address discrimination based on sex, including sexually harassing conduct that interferes with or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's education programs and activities, districts are required to adopt and publish grievance procedures providing for the prompt and equitable resolution of sex discrimination complaints.<sup>4</sup> For more information, see the Department of Education's Dear Colleague Letter: Sexual Violence (April 4, 2011) at: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.html>.*
- *See the Model Campus Stalking Policy by the Stalking Resource Center for assistance on how to ensure that school policies and procedures clearly define gender-based violence behaviors, clarify jurisdiction and report procedures, and provide for victim supports: [www.victimsofcrime.org/docs/src/model-campus-stalking-policy.pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://www.victimsofcrime.org/docs/src/model-campus-stalking-policy.pdf?sfvrsn=2).*
- *In reviewing policies and procedures regarding school response to incidents of gender-based violence, schools should aim to reestablish a safe and equitable learning environment for all students, including both victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence, whenever possible.*

### 4. ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

Build relationships with community groups and organizations that provide services to victims of gender-based violence to increase awareness of community supports and resources available for students and educators. Local law enforcement and staff from organizations established to assist victims of gender-based crimes are excellent resources and are available in many communities.

#### **Additional Resources:**

Information on gender-based violence can be found at the following technical assistance center Web sites and other federally supported Web sites:

- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights  
[www.ed.gov/ocr/prevention.html](http://www.ed.gov/ocr/prevention.html)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen\\_dating\\_violence.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html)
- U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime  
[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/)
- U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women  
[www.ovw.usdoj.gov](http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov)
- U.S. Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons  
[www.state.gov/j/tip/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/)
- 1is2Many  
[www.whitehouse.gov/1is2many](http://www.whitehouse.gov/1is2many)
- Break the Cycle  
[www.breakthecycle.org/](http://www.breakthecycle.org/)
- Findyouthinfo  
<http://findyouthinfo.gov/youth-topics/teen-dating-violence>

<sup>3</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1681-88.

<sup>4</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.8(b).

- Futures Without Violence  
[www.futureswithoutviolence.org/](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/)
- Idaho Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence's Center for Healthy Teen Relationships  
<http://idvsa.org/>
- Men Can Stop Rape  
[www.mencanstoprape.org/](http://www.mencanstoprape.org/)
- National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments  
<http://safesupportivelearning.cd.gov>
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center  
[www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)
- Office of Special Education Programs' Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports  
[www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)
- PreventConnect  
<http://preventconnect.org>
- Stalking Resource Center  
[www.victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/stalking-resource-center](http://www.victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/stalking-resource-center)
- Stopbullying  
[www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)
- Womenshealth  
[www.womenshealth.gov/violence-against-women/index.html](http://www.womenshealth.gov/violence-against-women/index.html)

### **Sample Definitions of Behaviors and Activities Commonly Associated with Gender-Based Violence**

**Stalking:** Stalking can be defined as a pattern of repeated and unwanted attention, harassment, contact, or any other course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear. Stalking is commonly understood to include:

- Repeated, unwanted, intrusive, and frightening communications from the perpetrator by phone, mail, and/or e-mail.
- Repeatedly leaving or sending the victim unwanted items, presents, or flowers.
- Following or lying in wait for the victim at places such as home, school, work, or recreation place.
- Making direct or indirect threats to harm the victim or the victim's children, relatives, friends, or pets.
- Damaging or threatening to damage the victim's property.
- Harassing the victim through the Internet.
- Posting information or spreading rumors about the victim on the Internet, in a public place, or by word of mouth.
- Obtaining personal information about the victim by accessing public records, using Internet search services, hiring private investigators, going through the victim's garbage, following the victim, contacting the victim's friends, family, coworkers, or neighbors, etc.<sup>5</sup>

**Sexual Assault:** Sexual assault is any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. Sexual assault includes such sexual activities as forced sexual intercourse, forcible sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. 2012. [www.ovw.usdoj.gov/aboutstalking.htm](http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/aboutstalking.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. 2012. [www.ovw.usdoj.gov/sexassault.htm](http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/sexassault.htm).

**Intimate Partner Violence or Teen Dating Violence:** Teen dating violence — also called intimate relationship violence or intimate partner violence among adolescents or adolescent relationship abuse — includes physical, psychological, or sexual abuse; harassment; or stalking of any person ages 12 to 18 in the context of a past or present romantic or consensual relationship.<sup>7</sup>

**Human Trafficking:** Human trafficking is a crime involving the exploitation of someone for the purposes of compelled labor or a commercial sex act through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.<sup>8</sup> Where a person younger than 18 is induced to perform a commercial sex act, it is a crime regardless of whether there is any force, fraud, or coercion.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. 2011. [www.nij.gov/topics/crime/intimate-partner-violence/teen-dating-violence/welcome.htm](http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/intimate-partner-violence/teen-dating-violence/welcome.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, U.S. Department of State. 2013. [www.state.gov/j/tip/id/domestic/index.htm](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/id/domestic/index.htm).

<sup>9</sup> U.S.C. §7102(8) defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as: “(A) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or (B) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.”

NOTE: This publication contains URLs created and maintained by private organizations. These URLs are provided for the reader’s convenience, and the U.S. Department of Education is not responsible for controlling or guaranteeing the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of the information in them. Further, the inclusion of URLs and the information in them, and the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations, do not reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse the information, products, and services mentioned or any views expressed therein. All Web sites were accessed on February 1, 2013.

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