COUNTY OF ALBEMARLE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND:
The Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Albemarle/Charlottesville Project receives its funding from the Federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative, a collaboration of the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services and Justice, that was formed to address rising concerns about youth violence, substance abuse and school safety. Working collaboratively with community partners and school staff and administration, the project has drawn the County and City public school systems together to jointly address issues that affect students’ ability to learn and succeed.

Four-year funding from the federal program began in 2009 and will end on June 30, 2013. The Federal SS/HS program is slowly being phased out and there are no options to reapply for federal support. Some carryover funds may allow discreet program elements to continue for a limited time after June, 2013. The Core Management Team of the local Albemarle/Charlottesville project is working to identify funding priorities for continuation in the longer term. Community support will be sought to continue and build upon the progress and momentum of the last four years.

The purpose of this Executive Summary is to provide an overview of the Program’s efforts and successes to-date, as well as possible options for the Program’s continuation.

STRATEGIC PLAN:
Goal 1. Provide excellent educational opportunities to all Albemarle County residents

DISCUSSION:
The data from the Albemarle/Charlottesville 2012 Spring School Climate survey was tabulated in June and thus far, demonstrates overwhelmingly positive outcomes. Project work to-date has helped make the following reductions possible:

- 26% reduction in the percentage of students (grades 6-12) reporting bullying
- 34% reduction in the percentage of students (grades 6-12) involved in a physical fight on school property in the past 12 months
- 24.9% reduction in the number of high school students reporting drinking alcohol in the past 30 days

Initiatives to Support School Safety and Decrease Violence
More than 11,000 students (grades 3-12) completed the annual Spring School Climate Survey in spring 2012. As suggested by the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Core Management Team (CMT), the middle and high school surveys were revised to eliminate questions dealing with threat assessments and added questions dealing with student perception of school climate. These additional questions were developed in a collaborative process that included student input from the Albemarle County High School Student Council.

In response to several community incidents of gang activity and a SS/HS-sponsored gang forum, the police chiefs of both the County and the City developed a local steering committee, the Gang Reduction Achieved through Community Engagement (GRACE) Team, and invited project staff to participate. A SS/HS staff member with former law enforcement experience has been tasked with the planning and implementation of a comprehensive gang model to serve the County and the City.
Currently sixteen Albemarle County Schools use the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program to combat bullying in schools. Two schools use Second Step, a program aimed at reducing violence by providing reinforcement for positive behavior and development of sound social and emotional skills in the middle school setting. Other schools use a combination of these and other evidence-based programs and strategies that integrate and build positive school climates. The three major County high schools are using student-led initiatives to address bullying prevention and other risky behaviors, including underage drinking and teen dating violence; creating messages that support positive student behavior and strengthen the school communities in general.

In response to a request from school counselors and administrators, SS/HS staff gathered information and expert advice about relational aggression among girls in the ACPS school communities. SS/HS staff formed a panel that included administrators, social workers, school counselors and mental health experts. The participants shared their perspectives on differences in gender bullying and offered ideas and strategies for addressing social issues between girls. This event has led to ongoing discussions, including a book study discussion group that will review: “Little Girls Can Be Mean: Four Steps to Bully-Proof Girls in the Early Grades.”

**Initiatives to Reduce Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Use**

SS/HS staff works to engage and involve high school students and community members in prevention efforts. The SS/HS Albemarle/Charlottesville site was awarded a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Underage Drinking Town Hall grant and used the proceeds to hold a parent/teen under age drinking information and prevention event in the spring of 2012. The event was developed in partnership with the City Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office, the UVA Teen Health Center, UVA’s Gordy Center for Substance Abuse Prevention and the County and City police departments. After the event, high school student groups have continued to work with SS/HS project leaders to plan awareness events at football game tailgates, proms, homecoming, and other student gatherings throughout the school year.

**Initiatives to Promote Positive Student Behavior**

SS/HS staff and programming work on many fronts and grade levels to support safe and socially appropriate student behavior, strengthening the overall learning community and helping each individual student reach his or her fullest potential.

SS/HS staff continues to receive numerous reports of improved student behavior and classroom environment in schools implementing Responsive Classroom (RC). RC is viewed as an effective classroom strategy and more than 300 school staff members have been trained in RC through SS/HS funding. In addition to funding initial training, SS/HS project leaders provide implementation and curriculum support with Community of Practice meetings. These monthly networking sessions have been held in many formats, including school site visits to look at classroom set up, facilitated discussions about particular components of RC strategy, and outside speakers who lead formal presentations about RC.

After reviewing the positive impacts and success that elementary school classrooms were experiencing with RC, two middle school administrators approached SS/HS staff to ask if similar programs could be investigated for students in grades 6-8. In June 2012, representatives from Developmental Designs provided a half-day information session to representatives from all of the area middle schools. Developmental Designs is a teaching strategy that provides the same integration of socio-emotional and academic learning that is the cornerstone of RC. Conversations with middle school administrators are ongoing and several schools continue to consider when and how they can incorporate this strategy into their school communities.

In response to heightened community concern about dating and relationship violence, the Sixteenth District Court Services Unit approached SS/HS staff to assist with court-ordered education on healthy relationships for students charged with partner/dating violence. Safe Dates: an Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention Curriculum, a model program listed in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, was the evidence-based program chosen to empower change in attitudes and behaviors associated with dating abuse and violence. SS/HS staff worked in teams and individually with students to teach Safe Dates lessons and support improved relationship skills for court-supervised youth in the community.

**Initiatives to Support In-School Mental Health Services**

SS/HS funding makes mental health counseling services available in all Albemarle County and Charlottesville middle and high schools. To communicate the availability of these services more broadly, SS/HS staff created an informational brochure about Student Assistance Program for students, parents and school staff. SS/HS staff also provided continued education opportunities for school counselors and community mental health workers. These included a March 2012 panel discussion entitled “How Grief Affects Students” and an April 2012 discussion about “Relational Aggression in Girls.” To support students and families whose lives are affected by abuse, SS/HS staff partnered with seven non-profit
organizations to sponsor community events focused on Child Abuse Prevention in April 2012. A weekly newspaper co-sponsored a six page insert, which utilized a design created by the SS/HS Project Coordinator and included a calendar of events, community resources, advice on keeping children safe and safeguard tips for parents and caregivers. In response to recent community incidents, SS/HS staff collaborated with Dr. Peter Sheras, UVA, Region 10 and Albemarle County High School to sponsor a panel discussion on suicide prevention.

**Collaboration and Community Partnership**
SS/HS staff continues to work collaboratively with community partner groups and agencies to respond to community needs and events, and to raise awareness for student health and safety issues. Project staff members are routinely invited to present at local events, community days and parent engagement events to strengthen parent/school and student/school connections.

Community events and presentations have included:

- Bullying Prevention in the Promotion of a Positive School Climate, Virginia Bullying Prevention Conference, June 2012
- State Superintendents-Judges Committee Meeting, July 2012
- Virginia Olweus Bullying Prevention Networking and Technical Assistance Sessions, July and October 2012
- Albemarle County School Health Advisory Board
- Parent-Teacher Organization meetings at the elementary, middle and high school level
- YOUTH NEX Statewide School-Based Bullying Prevention Conference, June 2012

Finally, in recognition of the impact SS/HS work is having in the local community, the local project was awarded the Virginia Department of Health’s “Innovative Violence Prevention Award” in June 2012. The award recognized the project as a catalyst for reductions in school-based physical fights, incidents of bullying, behavioral referrals of students and reported offenses since the grant award in 2009. The local SS/HS project has been cited as a successful model in several meetings and publications that are distributed by the Federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative. Local project staff is routinely asked to share experience, program resources and expertise with other SS/HS project sites across the nation at meetings, webinars and conferences.

The National Safe Schools Center recently requested permission to include the Albemarle/Charlottesville Peer Support Survey and Cyber-bullying Summits as model bullying prevention tools/methodology on the stopbullying.gov website. The Albemarle/Charlottesville SS/HS Project was also included in the federally produced toolkits, “Supportive School Discipline” and “Navigating Information Sharing.”

**Beyond Federal Funding: What Happens After June 30, 2013**
Federal funding for the Albemarle/Charlottesville SS/HS project ends on June 30, 2013. No re-application for funding is possible, but the project is eligible for a one year no-cost extension to finalize programming and clear the budget. The extension is an option offered to projects that have consistently met and exceeded the federal project’s benchmarks and expectations and have carryover funds from the 4-year funding period. To sustain benefits to the community after the final federal funding is received in June 2014, the local SS/HS Project’s CMT is identifying high priority initiatives for long-term sustainability and discussing ways that these elements could be supported through local funding. The goal is to focus on program components that have been successful in both the County and City public school systems and could continue to serve students and build stronger learning communities in both systems.

**BUDGET IMPACT:**
There is no budget impact associated with this Report.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**
Staff is not making a recommendation at this time. The purpose of this Executive Summary is to provide an overview of the Program’s efforts and successes to-date and possible options for the Program’s continuation.

**ATTACHMENTS:**
Safe Schools/Healthy Students Annual Report 2012

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