

Hotspot Mapping: How Colorado is working to improve school climate to prevent violence

Practitioners and Advocates Featured:

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The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has adopted hotspot mapping as part of its strategic plan to prevent sexual violence and related safety and health issues. The process brings school communities together to physically map safe and unsafe spaces, while building trusting relationships and empowering youth to be part of developing solutions. Twelve schools in Colorado are piloting this initiative to improving school climate and prevent multiple forms of violence, including sexual and teen dating violence.

HOTSPOT MAPPING: WHAT IS IT?

Hotspot mapping is an evidence-informed approach used to not only pinpoint where students feel safe or unsafe, but also propose recommendations for change. Identifying spaces as “hot” or “cold” is the first step in a community shifting their environment through policy, physical, and norm changes. Hotspot mapping is an ongoing process to build capacity in communities, allowing them to continue assessing and improving safety overtime. The state public health department is using hot spot mapping activity guides from [Shifting Boundaries](#), an evidence-based curriculum for teen dating and sexual violence.

Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, grantees in Colorado are delving deeper into the notion of safety and the various aspects that can affect whether or not a person feels safe in an area. Hotspot mapping can impact a range of community- and relationship-level risk and protective factors including community disorganization, community and school connectedness,

and youth and adult connectedness. Danielle Tuft, of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment says, “It’s both about changing the negative spaces, but also recognizing our strengths in community. It’s about determining how we can replicate our positive spaces within the larger community or school setting.”

SUPPORTING YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Colorado is focused on positive youth development through building skills, opportunities, and authentic relationships with young people across the state. Through the hotspot mapping work, partners recognize that youth leadership, community engagement and shared decision-making are crucial to creating positive social change. In addition to taking part in mapping, students bring their community-specific experiences into discussions to better understand the data and what they see as strengths and needs. They assist in the planning process, develop their own recommendations and present results to their administrators. These sorts of activities help youth build their skills as change makers as they decide on appropriate solutions.

IMPLEMENTING THE APPROACH: FROM BUY IN TO MAPPING TO RESULTS

Hotspot mapping in Colorado has been a fairly low cost initiative and has a flexible method to its implementation. The following are the common elements of the process in Colorado:

- Gain buy in and recruit youth
- Facilitate mapping activity and focused discussion
- Analyze results and create master map with collected data
- Identify recommendations for environmental or policy change
- Present results and recommendations to stakeholders

Recruiting a large and diverse group of people along with acquiring buy in from key stakeholders is vital to a successful project. Hotspot mapping allows both participants and stakeholders to begin to dig deeper into why places are perceived as safe or unsafe. It can be implemented in ways that help the community improve their own spaces. One of the grantees, Derek McCoy, the Youth Community Educators Program Coordinator at Project PAVE, is implementing hotspot mapping through a strengths-based approach. “We really want to highlight and promote the safest spaces, and determine how we can make other spaces as safe as those.” Project PAVE is undertaking this by passing out green, yellow, and red markers, allowing the youth to highlight the spaces they identify as safe, moderate, and unsafe, respectively. The information drawn from those directly interacting with the spaces can then be used to push for recommendations. In the school Derek works with, the initiative has resulted in greater staff presence in spaces with low visibility and during certain points of the day, such as lunch time.

At another school in Colorado, hotspot mapping uncovered that girls labeled their locker room as an unsafe space. While there was a curtain, many of the girls did not feel it offered enough privacy as the boys had to walk past the girls locker room to get to their own. Through the hotspot mapping process and listening to students, the school learned that this was an issue for the girls, but not a concern for the boys. The school decided to switch around the girls and boys locker rooms as a solution as the boys locker room offered greater privacy.

CONNECTING AND MOBILIZING BEYOND THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Hotspot mapping has also helped school officials recognize that students may feel unsafe in a lot of shared spaces outside of the school – parks, fast food restaurants, walking paths, and gas stations were some of the spaces named. Understanding the experiences of students both inside and outside the school has shown schools the importance of forming partnerships with other entities that students may interact with outside of the school property. These partnerships can be used to promote a climate of safety both within schools and the larger community.

In the future, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment hopes to expand their initiative to additional communities with the goal of connecting hotspot mapping to community mobilization and encouraging a sustainable and continuous process for improving community climate and safety.



*Students map out spaces that they perceive to be safe and unsafe at their school.
Photo provided by Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment*

Danielle Tuft is the Sexual Violence Prevention Program Manager at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. As a public health professional, she has worked on a variety of projects in partnership with both government and nonprofit sectors and brings experience in community mobilization, grant development and management, and training and technical assistance. In her current role she manages Colorado’s Sexual Violence Prevention Community Grant Program and works to build stakeholder capacity in using a shared risk and protective factor approach for effective violence prevention.

Derek McCoy joined PAVE in 2011 and is currently the Violence Prevention Director. He, alongside his team, developed a healthy masculinity curriculum, titled “True Man,” which is one of his major passions for working with PAVE. Derek believes that by transforming some key pieces within the masculine culture (processing and expressing emotions in healthy ways, and bringing value to femininity/diverse identities), safer spaces will come to be and rates of violence will decrease.

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RESOURCES

- [Colorado's violence prevention strategic plan](#)
- [2013 PreventConnect recording on Shifting Boundaries](#)
- [Shifting Boundaries Activity Guide](#)
- [CO's Positive Youth Development Tool](#)
- [CO's Youth Engagement Continuum](#)
- [News coverage of Colorado's hot spot work](#)

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