

# Fostering school environments that prevent teen dating violence and sexual harassment: Comprehensive prevention in California

Practitioners and Advocates Featured:

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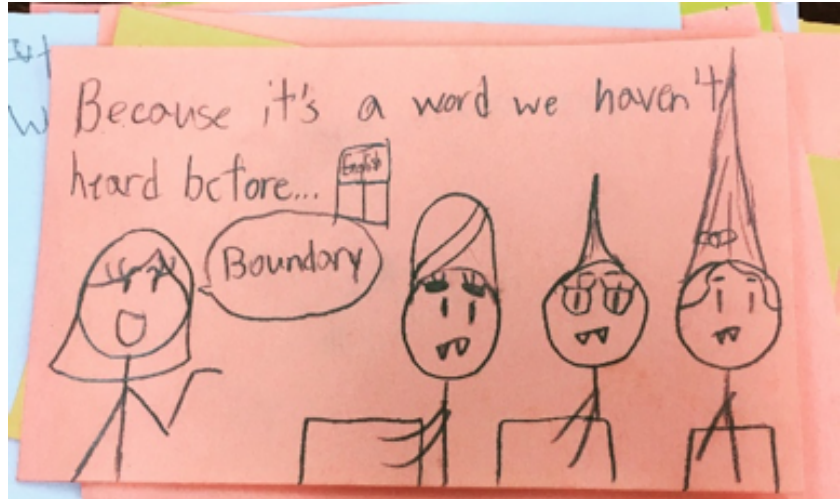
[SafeQuest Solano](#)



With a growing evidence-base for interventions like Shifting Boundaries that focus on improving school environments to prevent teen dating violence and sexual violence, practitioners are increasingly implementing efforts that combine classroom lessons along with school-wide changes. The Shifting Boundaries curriculum is an evidence-based, multi-level program for middle school students to prevent sexual harassment and precursors to dating violence. The program, as it is implemented in California by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), is unique in that it embraces an environmental approach that identifies multiple strategies to support young people and creates change at the institutional level, along with the Shifting Boundaries classroom lessons. As part of the Rape Prevention and Education Program, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is implementing Shifting Boundaries with two local partners: SafeQuest Solano (in Fairfield) and Center for Non Violent Community (in Sonoma). Together the state and local partners work to comprehensively improve school climate and build environments that support safety for students and school staff. This has involved gaining school buy-in, implementing the curriculum and acting on recommendations for school-wide changes.

## COMPREHENSIVE VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS

According to Mina White, an epidemiologist at CDPH, comprehensive violence prevention requires addressing multiple levels of the socioecological model from the individual level to relationship, community and societal levels. In the school setting, she is concerned with not only implementing curricula that can increase individual student knowledge, but also focusing on school-wide changes that shift the climate for the entire school community. CDPH has created an implementation guide to help others understand the infrastructure and steps involved in order to roll out the program. With this support, the sites are working with schools to implement multiple elements of the program: classroom-based lessons, Respecting Boundaries Agreements (RBA); student "hot spot mapping" of safe and unsafe areas of the schools; and posters to increase awareness and reporting of teen dating violence/sexual violence harassment with contact names for school counselors.



*A student artwork incorporating language from the Shifting Boundaries curriculum.  
Photo provided by SafeQuest Solano.*

## GAINING BUY-IN AND ENGAGING PARTNERS

One of the first steps to implementation is gaining buy-in from school administrators and other key stakeholders. Partnerships with teachers, students, parents, counselors, and others have been critical. Alaina Star, SafeQuest Solano's Director of Youth Services and Prevention says, "Rather than jumping into the classrooms right away, we had several meetings with the principal, met with the assistant principals, the counselors. We also did teacher trainings." Alaina and her partners also made sure that the parents and students were familiar with SafeQuest Solano by attending school events and establishing a presence in the classroom through the shadowing of teachers. By being involved in the school prior to implementing the program, SafeQuest Solano discovered that the yard duty staff were crucial members of the school community to include in their process. They were able to utilize the relationship students have with them and incorporate the yard duty staff into their program. The SafeQuest Solano team intentionally placed themselves in various school settings and functions because it was important that those in the school didn't perceive them as outsiders. Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with the school district in the early stages of the programming was an additional means of ensuring that decisionmakers and gate-keepers were on board.

As SafeQuest Solano moved into implementation, they found that engagement with partners throughout the process is a way to continually incorporate feedback from those taking part in the program. For example, they involve teachers by sharing data gathered through hotspot mapping and through asking for feedback about what could be changed. This has helped with ensuring that the teachers will be on board with enacting changes based on what the data shows.

## SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

External factors have posed some challenges to the implementation and evaluation of the program. For example, the school has experienced high turnover rates with only three out of ten teachers having stayed since the school started Shifting Boundaries three years ago. SafeQuest Solano staff have had to continue to onboard teachers and gain buy-in each year and are considering how this may necessitate longer-term implementation and evaluation of the program outcomes as there are more variables at play.

Despite challenges, the school in Fairfield has implemented many changes to the school environment that support prevention. For example, the school used the hotspot mapping data to add more staff to certain locations and apply for a safety and security grant. Once awarded, they allocated the money to install security cameras in the areas the students felt uncomfortable – areas such as the stairwells. The SafeQuest Solano staff have also seen the students adopt some of the language from the curriculum related to boundaries into their everyday language (e.g. "you violated my boundaries"). Furthermore, the school has incorporated language from the RBA to influence and update their student statement form, a document where students record the specifics when issues arise. They have also changed other internal forms (e.g. counseling forms) to reflect the language as well. With continued programming, the team hopes to implement further policy and environmental changes based on recommendations that arise from students and the school community.

There have also been great successes in Sonora, where the students wanted to see more supervision and attention from yard duty staff. This request resulted in a shift in the yard duty staff's behavior. Students have since reported that the yard duty staff are more attentive to what is going on in the recess area, rather than just chatting with one another. Another success from Sonora has been the integration of the Rape Crisis Center staff into the school environment. The Rape Crisis Center staff are now seen as adult allies and have since been able to reinforce the importance of the issues the students are learning about. The Rape Crisis Center staff have also been able to build upon this relationship and facilitate programs for the school outside their Shifting Boundaries scope of work. For example, the principal has requested their expertise on several topics ranging from workshops on trauma-informed services for adults to empathy and self-esteem workshops for students.

CDPH, Safequest Solano, and Center for Non Violent Community hope to expand the program to more schools in the future and continue to support the prevention of sexual harassment and precursors to dating violence through Shifting Boundaries.



*Students map out where they feel safe and unsafe in their school environment. Green=safe. Red=unsafe. Yellow = somewhat unsafe. Photo provided by SafeQuest Solano*

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During her 17 years working with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), Mina White has worked on conducting surveillance and program evaluation in the areas of asthma, tuberculosis, and other chronic and infectious diseases. She has been working as an epidemiologist with CDPH's Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) Program for 11 years, focusing on surveillance and evaluation of violence prevention programs, including domestic violence, teen dating violence, and sexual violence.

Alaina Star has spent the past 4 years working as a sexual assault and domestic violence advocate at a Rape Crisis Center in California. Initially acting as the agency's prevention education coordinator, she focused on providing and integrating rape prevention education programming in elementary school, middle school, high school and college-level environments outside of the bay area. She has a B.S. in Psychology with an emphasis on Child Development from U.C. Davis and is currently acting as SafeQuest Solano's Director of Youth Services and Prevention.

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## RESOURCES

- [2018 PreventConnect web conference on school climate and hotspot mapping](#)
- [2013 PreventConnect web conference on Shifting Boundaries](#)

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