

ACCESS Goal: *Decrease gang activity on campuses*

Program Overview

Austin Community Collaboration to Enhance Student Success (ACCESS) first funded a gang specialist school resource officer (SRO) in Fall 2007 to decrease gang activity on campuses and to educate students, parents, and community members about gangs (LaTurner, Basu, & Samii-Shore, 2009). In August 2009, the gang specialist SRO position was raised to a gang detective position. The ACCESS-funded gang detective is a member of the Joint Juvenile Gang Intervention Unit (JJGIU), along with another detective from the Austin Independent School District (AISD) Police Department, and two detectives and a gang prevention coordinator



in students' reports of gang activity on the annual Student Substance Use and Safety Survey, as an indicator of program effectiveness. In addition, evaluation staff analyzed staff member reports of campus gang activity and AISD discipline records.

The AISD Student Substance Use and Safety survey is administered each spring to a random, representative sample of AISD students (Naik, 2010). Students are asked to respond to the question "To the best of your knowledge, how often do gang activities occur at your school?" Response options are *happens daily*, *happens at least once a week*, *happens at least once a month*, *happens on occasion*, and *never happens*. The first three response options are used as an indicator of regular gang activity.

Since 2007–2008, the school year in which the JJGIU began, students' reports of gang activity at school have consistently declined, reversing a trend of increased reports of gang activity between 2003–2004 and 2006–2007 (Figure 1). In 2006–2007, 43% of middle school students and 40% of high school students reported gang activity occurring regularly at their school. By 2009–2010, reports of regular gang activity had dropped to 30% of middle school students and 29% of high school students, a decrease of 13 percentage points for middle school students and a decrease of 11 percentage points for high school students. These drops far exceed the ACCESS goal of a 5% reduction in students' reports of gang activity.

Figure 1. AISD Middle and High School Students Reporting Regular Gang Activity ivling R Ah



(Austin Public Safety Commission Meeting, 2010), representatives of the Austin Police Department and the Texas Department of Safety described a shift in local youth gangs toward affiliation with drug cartels.

The effect of gang prevention work in the schools was further examined through comparisons bet



Figure 3. High School Students and Staff: How Often Do Gang Activities Occur at Your School?

Source. AISD Student Substance Use and Safety Survey 2010 and AISD Staff Climate Surveys, 2008–2009 and 2009–2010, Department of Program Evaluation

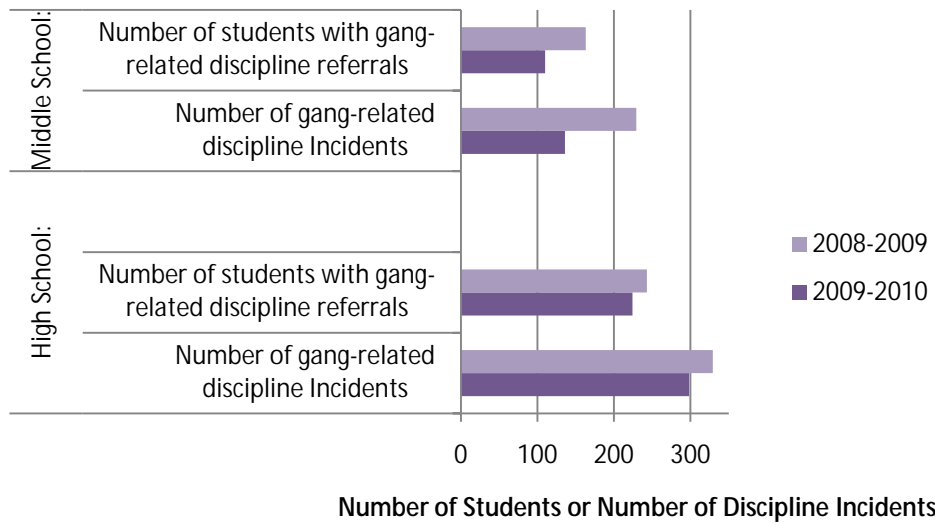
Note. The majority of students responded that gang activity happens either *on occasion* or *never*.

Students were asked to report whether any of their friends belonged to a gang and whether they themselves took part in any gang activities during the school year. In Spring 2010, 28% of middle school students reported that their friends belonged to a gang, down from 35% in Spring 2009. Middle school students' reports of their own participation in gang activity fell from 9% in Spring 2009 to 7% in Spring 2010. The percentage of high school students reporting having friends who were members of a gang remained the same between Spring 2009 and Spring 2010 (28%), as did the percentage reporting their own participation in gang activities (6%).

Campus disciplinary actions related to minor gang activity (e.g., dress code violations and throwing signs) were examined for middle and high school students, comparing the number of discipline referrals for gang activity in 2008–2009 with the number in 2009–2010 (Figure 4). Among middle school



Figure 4. Middle and High School Student Gang Activity Discipline Referrals



Source. AISD student discipline data extracted from DEEDS through ADIS as of 2/23/11

Changes in discipline referrals for minor gang activity could reflect factors such as gang activity trends in the city of Austin and increased campus staff awareness of gang signs. Another factor that makes interpretation of changes in discipline referrals difficult is that the increased use of local youth gangs by drug cartels may have led to decreases in visible gang activity on AISD campuses if youth gang members were encouraged to maintain a lower profile while at school or to drop out of school (Austin Public Safety Commission Meeting, 2010).

Summary of Findings

The ACCESS goal for the gang detective is to decrease gang activity on AISD campuses. The following list summarizes the findings of the 2009–2010 evaluation regarding students' reports, staff reports, and AISD discipline records of campus gang activities, as well as the prevention and law enforcement interventions of the ACCESS-funded gang detective.

Activities:

- x The gang detective participated in 113 presentations, which were attended by 2,293 AISD youth, 504 AISD staff, 247 parents, and 285 other adults who work with youth.
- x The gang detective taught the Gang Resistance Education and Training program to 110 students in six elementary school classes at two campuses.
- x The gang detective conducted 104 campus consultations and 108 gang assessments.

Outcomes:

- x Since 2007–2008, students' reports of gang activity at both middle schools and high schools have declined, reversing a trend of increased reports of gang activity in the years preceding the JJGIU's prevention efforts.





