

SPAVA

Society for the Prevention of Aggressiveness and Violence Among Adolescents

2008-09 Annual Report



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to convey the impact of the Society for the Prevention of Aggressiveness and Violence among Adolescents (SPAVA) Program on students in the Jefferson County Public School (JCPS) District and in local private schools during SPAVA's ninth full year of implementation.

SPAVA is a unique violence-prevention and character-building program presented by trained community volunteer mentors to classes of students and their teachers in grades one through twelve. Mentors follow one of two detailed curriculum guides—one for students in grades three through twelve and one for students in grades one and two. The program, which must be requested by a teacher or school administrator, is presented in weekly 45-minute sessions ranging from five to ten weeks in duration. SPAVA students are encouraged to develop and conduct service-learning projects in order to apply something they learned in SPAVA and share it with others. They are also encouraged to apply for SPAVA scholarships and awards.

SPAVA was developed by neurosurgeon Timir Banerjee, M.D., in response to the 1997 school shooting tragedy at Heath High School in western Kentucky. Dr. Banerjee's mission in creating SPAVA was for community adults "to help create a nonviolent society by being role models for the younger generation." The goals of SPAVA are to promote respect, honor, and integrity among students; to recognize and understand feelings; to develop anger-management skills; and to recognize the characteristics of famous men and women of peace.

Information for this report was derived from evaluation surveys completed by SPAVA students in grades three through twelve and their teachers and mentors from JCPS and from area private schools. It also includes evaluation responses from teachers of SPAVA students in grades one and two and answers to eight evaluation questions posed verbally by teachers to these students. All surveys include both direct and open-ended response information. Florence Chang and Deven Vaught—assisted by Ryan McCafferty—of the District Planning Office collected and analyzed the direct-response data from evaluation surveys. Additionally, they collected and analyzed the suspension information included in this annual report.

KEY FINDINGS

From Evaluation Surveys

- Students and teachers agreed that the greatest student growth as a result of SPAVA was in knowledge of peacemakers and peacemaking, followed by the ability to think of different ways to solve problems when upset.
- Students and teachers agreed that students improved in each of the 11 SPAVA content areas after participating in SPAVA. These 11 areas are as follows: calming down when upset, figuring out the real problem when upset, thinking about different ways to solve a problem when upset, solving problems with others, recognizing and understanding one's own feelings, recognizing and understanding other people's feelings, showing respect for oneself, showing respect for others, learning about peacemakers, learning about peacemaking, and behaving as peacemakers. Improvements in each of these areas were all statistically significant ($p < .001$).
- 74 percent of students reported that they had changed because of SPAVA.
- Although JCPS suspensions rose by 13 percent from first semester to second semester, suspensions of students participating in SPAVA rose by only 4 percent pre- and post-SPAVA participation.
- 86 percent of students recommend SPAVA for other students, and 84 percent of teachers would like SPAVA in their class again.
- Students always rated their own abilities addressed in SPAVA, both pre- and post-SPAVA, higher than teachers rated these students' abilities pre- and post-SPAVA.

From JCPS Suspension Data

Suspension data were pulled for students in 16 participating classes in middle, high, and special schools. Overall, their suspensions increased by 4 percent in 2008-09 when comparing their rates before and after participation in SPAVA. District suspensions overall increased by 13 percent from first semester to second semester.

PARTICIPATION

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Students who participated in SPAVA					
JCPS	786	1,384	1,374*	1,850	1,121
Private schools	294	145	180	177	118
Total	1,080	1,529	1,554	2,027	1,239
Total number of SPAVA sites					
JCPS	25	24	20	25	23
Private schools	4	2	2	3	3
Community sites	1	1	1	2	0
Total	30	27	23	30	26
Total number of classes					
JCPS	32	55	52	72	51
Private schools	7	6	6	6	5
Community sites	1	1	1	2	0
Total	40	62	59	80	56
Total number of active mentors					
JCPS	28	45	48	75	42
Private schools	1**	1**	1**	3**	1**
Community sites				4**	
Total	28	45	48	80	42
Scholarship award applicants					
JCPS		105	166	92	
Private schools		102	143	109	
Community sites				3	
Total	152~	207	309	204	199~
Scholarship award winners					
JCPS		37	40	74	55
Private schools		31	70	23	31
Community sites				2	
Total	33~	68	110	99	86

*Includes 80 JCPS students at one community site

**One mentor here also mentors in JCPS and is counted among the JCPS numbers already.

~JCPS and Catholic schools combined

EVALUATION

Evaluation Data for Grades Three Through Twelve

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From Student Surveys

A total of 518 students, grades three through twelve, returned student surveys from 30 classes out of 39 possible, resulting in a student response of 77 percent. This represents a 31 percent increase over the 2007-08 student response rate. Student surveys allowed responses of “not at all,” “a little bit,” and “a lot.” The percentages below reflect responses reported by students as “a little bit,” or “a lot.”

- 74 percent thought they had changed because of SPAVA.
- 78 percent said they felt more respected and cared about in their classroom because of SPAVA.
- 86 percent said they would recommend SPAVA to a friend.

The top seven areas of personal growth as a result of SPAVA reported by students are knowledge of peacemakers, knowledge of peacemaking, thinking about different ways to solve a problem when upset, calming down when upset, trying to figure out the real problem when upset, solving problems with other people, and recognizing and understanding other people’s feelings.

From Teacher Surveys

This information is from 34 returned teacher surveys of a possible 56, giving a response rate of 61 percent. Teachers’ response rate increased this year over last year’s rate by 19 percent. Again, percentages reported reflect responses of “a little bit” and “a lot.”

- 93 percent said students used anger-management skills taught in SPAVA.
- 86 percent reported a decrease in inappropriate classroom behaviors.
- 100 percent said they can use aspects of SPAVA with all students.
- 84 percent said they would like SPAVA for their class next year.

The top five areas of student growth because of SPAVA from teachers’ reports are knowledge of peacemaking and peacemakers, thinking about different ways to solve a problem when upset, solving problems they had with other people, and showing respect for others.

From Mentor Surveys

Mentors were asked to complete a survey for each class they worked with. Of a possible 56 surveys, 35 were returned. The response rate was 63 percent. This reflects a 10 percent decrease in mentor responses from last year.

- 86 percent rated their training as very adequate for presenting SPAVA's concepts and materials.
- 86 percent said they very closely or mostly followed the curriculum.
- 87 percent said the classroom teacher participated a lot during sessions.
- 46 percent thought students saw SPAVA as very relevant and valuable to their lives.
- 51 percent thought students saw SPAVA as a little relevant and valuable to their lives.

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For Grades One and Two

Responses From Teachers

Teachers of first- and second-grade students rated the most student growth in the areas of knowledge of peacemakers and peacemaking, trying to figure out the real problem when upset, thinking about different ways to solve problems, and recognizing and understanding their own feelings. Overall, teachers noted that the SPAVA concepts and curriculum guide were appropriate for the students in their age group. A couple of teachers noted that some of the vocabulary and the information on peacemakers were a little difficult for students.

What SPAVA People Say

From Evaluation Surveys

Students in grades three through twelve said:

- I've learned not to bully others.
- I can walk away from a bully.
- I can calm down when I get mad.
- I am acting nicer to people.
- Now I really stop, think, and listen to people's feelings.
- I don't let my actions get out of control.
- I don't make fun of people anymore.
- I solve problems in a different way.
- I have learned to deal with my feelings better.
- I started respecting my teachers.
- I just see everything through a different aspect.
- I think more about the consequences before I do things.
- I think more about others and their feelings.
- I'm a better peacemaker, and I help people out.
- I started to try to avoid conflicts and settle it down with some kind talk.
- Now I have a positive attitude.
- I have learned to respect others.
- I really stop and think things through more before I act.

Students in grades one and two said:

- I tried not yelling at people, using "I messages" instead of screaming in somebody's ear.
- "I messages" help me with my mom, and I cool down.
- I liked learning how to be nice to others and to be a peacemaker.
- When a little boy or girl is alone, I come over and I play with them.
- I sing to my stuffed animals and hug them when I am sad, angry, or alone.
- Now I tell the truth more to my mom.
- When I'm mad, I use STAR.

Teachers of students in grades three through twelve said:

- I see them walk away from situations when they are red-faced mad.
- They are calmer, quieter, on task, and helping each other more.
- Students are more respectful, think before reacting, and constantly bring up SPAVA in situations.
- Less shouting and fewer referrals for cursing and fighting

What SPAVA People Say

- They respect me when I ask them to do things, such as sit and be quiet.
- They are trying to encourage each other to do well.
- They tell me how they use STAR in and out of school. Students even tell me about how their peers use it in and out of school.
- I use it whenever there is a problem and to analyze problems in stories and history.
- I wish the program was mandated in all the schools.

Teachers of students in grades one and two said:

- I have seen them use “I messages” and have seen STAR being used more.
- When a situation occurs, I remind kids of the “choices” and to use positive ways to solve problems.
- I like the STAR concept; this will help students calm down. Additionally, it helps me stay calm.
- Kids love having a new teacher face in class.
- This program is a must for all classrooms!

Mentors of students in grades three through twelve said:

- It created a fairly safe place for students to express themselves; they realized we’re more alike than they previously thought.
- It created a shift in consciousness and the way they view others and put them in touch with their feelings.
- They valued knowing that someone other than their parents and teacher cares about them and their future.
- I think they valued learning how to be a friend and what to expect of a friend.
- These kids touched my life in a very positive way.
- It was helpful to use [SPAVA ideas and values] in my life, and the teacher said that also.
- It was a lot of work, but I learned a lot about the kids and myself.

Mentors of students in grades one and two said:

- I think they valued dealing with bullying—they wanted this and spent two weeks on it.
- I think they valued speaking up about personal issues in front of their friends.
- I was surprised at how many second graders got the concept of empathy and used it to work out problems.

What SPAVA People Say

- I was surprised that children grasped the concept of STAR so well.
- It gave me the direction I wanted, to learn if I enjoy teaching and what grade level I'd prefer.
- I really learned about controlling my impulses and expressing my feelings in a better way.

Other

- In response to prior years' requests that SPAVA create a means for older students to teach SPAVA to younger students, SPAVA developed and conducted a service-learning project with an after-school student group at Seneca High School. The students conducted two SPAVA sessions on bullying with students at nearby Goldsmith Elementary School. Assistance was provided by the Volunteer Talent Center (VTC) Service Learning Coordinator.
- A video was created of actual SPAVA sessions in response to repeated requests from new mentors. The Waggener Traditional High School Telemedia Department staff and students collaborated with SPAVA to film, edit, and copy the video, which is now available in SPAVA's lending library.
- A new SPAVA Peace and Kindness (PEAK) student award was created and awarded this year as a result of a donation by the Women's Club of Louisville, which also judged entries for it.
- Optional sessions were held for mentors to learn more about dealing with bullying, to troubleshoot challenges together, and to share experiences.
- The partnership continued between SPAVA and the University of Louisville (UofL). One psychology professor who requires students in two of her classes to do service-learning projects offered SPAVA as a choice. Several of these students served as SPAVA mentors, boosting our provision of the program to JCPS classes. This partnership also provided SPAVA with a part-time UofL student aide for the spring semester. Our aide presented her work with SPAVA and information about the program at UofL's first Service-Learning Fair in spring 2008.
- Site visits to classroom SPAVA sessions were conducted in spring using a rubric developed to note the manner and effectiveness of implementation of the program in classrooms.
- A new evaluation form was developed, used, and analyzed this year to better assess program effectiveness with students in grades one and

two. It included questions for teachers to ask their students, for which responses were recorded.

- The curriculum guide developed last year for use with students in grades one and two was modified to include more detailed instructions in response to requests from mentors who used the original guide last year.
- The SPAVA Advisory Council met once in December to give perspectives and counsel on several issues. Additional meetings were not held due to lack of need.
- The **Every 1 Reads** format continues to be emphasized during mentor trainings for use whenever materials are read aloud in SPAVA sessions.
- The SPAVA Awards Celebration this year included not only refreshments provided by Waggener's Culinary Arts Department students, as in the past, but also music performed by several Waggener Orchestra students. Many guests complimented both.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for 2009-10

- Update the two SPAVA curriculum guides with current recommendations, and omit dating logos so they are available for several years' use.
- Broaden mentor recruitment at local universities and in our community to lessen the constant number of unmet teacher requests for SPAVA because of too few mentors.
- Address a few new problem issues related to the SPAVA scholarship award program.
- Increase the conduct of SPAVA service learning with both older students teaching younger students and by SPAVA teachers with their classes.
- Continue to increase the evaluation response rate of teachers, mentors, and students.
- Maintain a relationship with SPAVA's Advisory Council members for meetings as needed.
- Develop a SPAVA professional-development (PD) session for teachers.



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