



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Gangs in Schools Task Force

2021

Authorizing Legislation: [RCW 28A.300.490](#)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gangs in Schools Task Force was created under Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28A.320.490 to examine current adult and youth gang activities that are affecting school safety. The task force met regularly from 2008–2013 to examine current adult and youth gang activities affecting school safety and to make recommendations to the Legislature.

Meetings concluded in 2013 and the recommendations previously submitted to the Legislature continue to stand:

1. Provide funding to support future task force work.
2. Provide funding for training, data collection, and implementation of innovative programs and promising practices. The task force also recommends that the Legislature provide funding to support the work of promising, community-based efforts.
3. Provide a dedicated apportionment for transition/re-entry programs for adjudicated youth. As a component of its draft policy and procedural guidance, the task force recognizes the importance of wraparound educational and re-engagement services for students who are suspended or expelled for gang-related activity.

In recent years, the Legislature has made significant investments in the establishment of a more comprehensive school safety program. As part of those efforts, the School Safety and Student Well-Being Advisory Committee stands poised to address any needed policy solutions related to gang activities in schools specifically.

INTRODUCTION

Senate Bill 5097 (2007) required the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to convene a Gangs in Schools Task Force to examine how gangs are affecting school safety. The task force is required to annually report its findings and recommendations to the education committees of the Legislature.

Ultimately, the task force chose to focus on three primary areas with direct impact on gang activity in schools: Data, policy guidance, and training.

UPDATE STATUS

The Gangs in Schools Task Force has not met since 2013. Since the creation of this task force, the Legislature has made significant investments in comprehensive school safety planning through efforts including, but not limited to:

- House Bill 6620 (2016) – Relating to cost-effective methods for maintaining and increasing school safety,
- House Bill 1216 (2019) – Concerning non-firearm measures to increase school safety and student well-being, and
- House Bill 1214 (2021) – Providing K–12 public school safety and security services by classified staff or contractors.

In addition, Washington state has established a state school safety network that includes a school safety center, data collection and monitoring, regional school safety and security programs, and the [School Safety and Student Well-Being Advisory Committee](#).

The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to advise OSPI, the regional centers, school districts, and public and private schools on all matters related to comprehensive school safety and student well-being. The advisory committee, which must meet at least quarterly, has specified duties, for example: make recommendations on policies and strategies; identify emerging issues; establish priorities; and engage the public. As additional attention or mitigation is needed to address the presence of gangs in schools, the Advisory Committee is poised to address these issues and provide recommended policy solutions in line with the comprehensive system of school planning that has been established.

Data

The Healthy Youth Survey (HYS), completed every other year by a representative sample of students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12, includes two questions related to youth gang affiliation and activity:

- Are there gangs at your school?
- In the past 12 months, have you been a member of a gang?

In 2018, 12% of 8th graders, 23% of 10th graders, and 17% of 12th graders responded 'yes' to having gangs in their schools. Further, 7% of 8th, 6% of 10th, and 6% of 12th grade students responded 'yes' to the question of gang membership. There is no category defined for reporting gang activity in current state or federal reports.

Policy Guidance

Previously, the task force examined local, regional, and national policies and guidance for addressing gang activity in schools. The task force then drafted policy guidance for school districts and communities, including definitions and identification criteria for recognizing gang activity within a school setting.

School districts may use the guidance to create their own policies and procedures regarding gang activity in their schools. Draft policy and procedure guidance documents are located on OSPI's [School Safety Center | Gangs in Schools](#) webpage.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The School Safety and Student Well-Being Advisory Committee (SS-SWAC) will address any new issues around gang activity in schools. The Gangs in Schools Task Force report reiterates the three recommendations previously provided to the Legislature. If addressing gang activity within schools is to be a priority for schools and districts, the task force recommends that the Legislature:

1. Provide funding to support future task force work.
2. Provide funding for training, data collection, and implementation of innovative programs and promising practices. The task force also recommends that the Legislature provide funding to support the work of promising, community-based efforts.
3. Provide a dedicated apportionment for transition/re-entry programs for adjudicated youth. As a component of its draft policy and procedural guidance, the task force recognizes the importance of wraparound educational and re-engagement services for students who are suspended or expelled for gang-related activity. The task force recommends funding such activities.

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