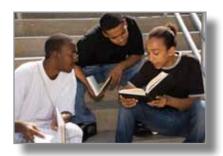## FACT SHEET

Violence and Learning

Violence and/or the fear of violence have serious implications in terms of school performance, attendance, and graduation. (1) The presence of violence impacts communities, individuals, and community institutions (particularly schools) in ways that interfere with learning and success in academics.

- **One in four middle and high school students from around the country report being a victim of violence at or around school (2)**
- **Fear of danger at school and in the community have measurable effects on school attendance, behavior, and grades (3,4)**
- **Children in early elementary school with a history of exposure to violence and/or are victims of violence score significantly lower on IQ and reading ability (on average, over 7 points lower on IQ and almost 10 points lower in reading achievement) (5)**
- **Urban elementary and middle school children who report witnessing violence in the community display lower levels of academic achievement that persists over time (6,7)**

At the community level, violence:

- Disrupts the social networks essential for a supportive environment for quality schools (8)
- Discourages investment in community institutions such as schools (8)

At the individual level, violence:

- Affects the emotional health of parents, influencing their ability to attend to school issues (9)
- Creates stress and anxiety among children, affecting their ability to concentrate and focus on learning (in some cases related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, (PTSD) (2,3,10–14)
- Leads to decreased attendance related to fears of violence either when walking to school or at school (12)

At the institutional (school), violence:

- Creates an environment of restrictiveness and fear that interferes with the learning process and encouragement of exploration and creativity
- Takes up resources to assure student and building security and address discipline issues, resources that could otherwise be invested in academic agendas
- Instills fear into volunteers, administrative and teaching staff, affecting their ability to focus on educating and supporting students
- Creates an environment of fear that affects the ability to recruit and maintain a quality teaching and administrative staff in the system

URBAN NETWORKS TO
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So what does all this mean?

Given the extensive focus in this country on improving the performance of schools and academic achievement of students, it seems clear that reducing or eliminating violence in the lives of children must be part of the solution. As we know that hungry and malnourished children do not learn well, such is also the case with children who fear, experience or witness violence in their homes, the community and/or their schools. While schools alone cannot fix all of this, there are things that schools can do ranging from addressing the school climate, teaching and promoting healthy social and interpersonal skills, addressing bullying and conflict resolution, and developing relationships with other community resources for family outreach/support, extracurricular activities, and mental health services. Schools, teachers and staff, and students and their families live with the serious consequences of violence and, in turn, can be an important part of the solution.

> "No school can be a great school
> unless it is a safe school."
>
> — Secretary Duncan, April 4, 2011 to
> National Forum for Youth Violence Prevention

TO LEARN MORE

- Visit the UNITY homepage   www.preventioninstitute.org/unity.html

- Access strategies, tools and resources in Prevention Institute's Preventing Violence & Reducing Injury focus area   www.preventioninstitute.org/focus-areas/preventing-violence-and-reducing-injury.html

- Read the UNITY Policy Platform. Developed partnership with UNITY cities, the UNITY Policy Platform describes the kinds of strategies that need to be in place to prevent violence www.preventioninstitute.org/component/jlibrary/article/id-290/127.html

UNITY builds support for effective, sustainable efforts to prevent violence before it occurs so that urban youth can thrive in safe environments with supportive relationships and opportunities for success.

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