

These issues also emerged in the basic descriptive comparison of the demographic characteristics of the treatment and control groups for family engagement and youth participation. As noted above, the treatment and control groups statistically different in the percentage of certain racial categories and average grade. Although the modeling strategies attempt to account for such differences, the control group is clearly not identical to the treatment group. There are also likely unobserved characteristics (i.e., difficulties at home, school engagement) that vary across the treatment and control groups that could also be related to attendance outcomes. Recommendations for how to address some of these concerns will be discussed below.

### Differences in School Characteristics

It also is important to note that the systematic differences between treatment and control youth may be driven by the fact that these two groups are drawn from potentially different schools. In order to identify control youth, schools not part of SUSO were matched to schools that were part of the SUSO intervention. While efforts were made to ensure that the control schools were similar to treatment schools based on demographic enrollment information, it is possible that other characteristics of the school environment may be related to attendance and student engagement. For example, Stewart (2008)<sup>22</sup> used National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) data and determined that student outcomes were related to the student's sense of belongingness or connection to the community. Further, factors related to the school climate such as the extent to which students feel safe, whether there are consistent procedures for discipline, and responsiveness of teachers to students concerned are related to truancy (e.g., Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001)<sup>23</sup>. School differences are extremely important because youth spend a significant amount of time in these settings.

The SUSO program did not capture detailed information about the schools that youth attended, however, the Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection project collects information about schools that can provide some insight into school-level differences. Table 38 provides descriptive information of several characteristics about the number of teachers (and their tenure in the school) and the prevalence of school discipline practices across treatment and control schools. Interestingly, the only statistically significant differences across treatment and control schools are the number of full-time teachers that are in their first year and the percent of students with more than one out of school suspension. Specifically, treatment schools had significantly more teachers that were in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching and a higher (albeit, still relatively small) percentage of students who received more than one out of school suspension. It is difficult to

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point in the school year. We believed this would maximize our potential control group. While this strategy was sufficient for the year end analysis, it made it more difficult to fully utilize all of the control group youth in the quarter by quarter analysis. DCPS has been a very valuable and collaborative partner in this evaluation effort.

<sup>22</sup> Stewart, E. B. (2008). School structural characteristics, student effort, peer associations, and parental involvement: The influence of school- and individuals-level factors on academic achievement. Education and Urban Society, 40(2), 179-204

<sup>23</sup> Available: [https://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/jjbul2001\\_9\\_1/contents.html](https://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/jjbul2001_9_1/contents.html)

specifically determine how these findings would be related to the observed differences in the results from the analyses evaluating attendance outcomes in SUSO, but it suggests that there may be some differences in school climate that may be important for understanding how the intervention works within particular schools.

**Table 38: Dept. of Education School Characteristics by Treatment and Control Schools**

School Characteristic	Treatment School Values (N=50)	Control School Values (N=23)	Difference Between Treatment & Control	T-Test of Difference
Number of Full Time Classroom Teachers <sup>24</sup>	29.57	29.96	-.39	-.53
Number of Classroom Teachers in 1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3.30	1.75	1.55	-2.10*
Number of Teachers in 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	2.00	1.70	.30	-.62
Number of Teachers Absent More than 10 Days	8.86	8.55	.31	-.23
% of Students Corporeal Punishment	.02	0	.01	-1.18
% of Students Expelled under Zero Tolerance	0	0	0	0
% of Students Referred to Law Enforcement	.14	.03	-.11	-1.54
% of Students Arrested in School	.14	.03	-.11	-1.54
% of Students with +1 Out of School Suspension	2.32	.70	-1.62	-3.28**
% of Students with +1 In-School Suspension	.31	.19	-.12	-.95

Source: Department of Education 2011-2012 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> For the school characteristics related to the number of teachers, only 20 control schools had available data to conduct t-tests.

<sup>25</sup> <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/>

### Implementation of Programming

The analyses provided in this report were able to narrow down the impact of the program across CBOs. The fact that some differences emerged in the direction and magnitude of the observed relationship between SUSO and attendance outcomes suggest that there are differences in the implementation of the program across CBOs. Although we only have a process evaluation for the Family Engagement program, there were clearly some observed differences in the extent to which CBOs complied with the process standards. It is possible that the capacity of CBOs to implement the program effectively could be related to differences in the outcomes. It may also be the case that the intensity and frequency of engagement with families may impact these outcomes as well. The contact effort analysis discussed above indicate that there were differences in the number of contacts for each family by CBO (and thus likely the extent to which services were provided also varied). This variation could explain some differences in the findings across CBOs.

Similar implementation issues are likely to exist within the youth participation program. While the analyses in this report focus on CBO differences in the impact of the youth program, youth within CBOs were involved in a number of club activities offered by the Youth Service Providers (YSP). Therefore, to the extent that YSPs offer a range of different services and youth were involved in multiple clubs, it would be expected that YSPs have varied impacts on attendance outcomes. It was not possible to conduct analyses by youth service providers because there is no way to adequately assign control youth to a Youth Service Provider. The decision for schools to work with certain YSPs were based on a number of factors that cannot be modeled into an analytic strategy easily. Also as noted above, given the data limitations, we were unable to assess the degree to which the YP program was implemented as designed.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Based on some of the limitations of the analyses that are a function of both the methodologies and the program design, CRA is proposing a few recommendations moving forward with the SUSO project.

First, there are several strategies that may be helpful in generating a more robust control group that can serve as an adequate comparison to the treatment group. As mentioned, one of the challenges in conducting analyses that accounted for the timing of referral was the way in which control group youth ‘quarter of referral’ was identified. In order to avoid this issue, OVSJG may want to consider integrating an experimental design into the implementation of SUSO. An experimental design randomly assigns subjects to either receive a treatment or be assigned to a control group (i.e., receive some already existing services or standard practice). This method has been referred to as the scientific “gold standard” because when individuals are assigned to treatment randomly, it can be assumed that variations between those in the comparison and the

treatment groups are random and should not influence or bias the outcomes of the study. In the case of SUSO, as youth are being identified as eligible for referral to either family engagement or youth participation – they could be randomly assigned to receive the SUSO program or alternatively be assigned to a control condition. The nature of this control condition could be based on preexisting practices within schools for addressing truancy issues (such as being assigned to school social worker) or could be a combination of more basic outreach efforts (e.g., sending pamphlets home, phone call from school about unexcused absences). This approach would enable OVSJG to have direct knowledge about the treatment and control youth, which would facilitate obtaining more real-time data on attendance for these youth.

Related to this point, we suggest that more timely attendance data be provided to OVSJG or placed into ETO in order to more precisely track changes in attendance that can be mapped to the timing of the intervention. For instance, the family engagement program was intended to be a 12-week intervention; however, due to the nature of attendance data we are only able to observe outcomes on a quarterly basis. It would be more precise to have attendance data that started at the time of referral and captured the youth’s unexcused absences 12 weeks later. We support the efforts to integrate a ‘data bump’ of attendance data from DCPS into the ETO system, which would provide more regular access to attendance outcomes for youth involved in the SUSO program.

OVSJG may also want to consider adopting alternative intervention strategies that would be amenable to existing relationships with the CBOs. If one of the main efforts to improve attendance by the CBOs is to help families write excuse notes or remind families of the importance of their child attending school, perhaps an engagement strategy that does not rely solely on case management may be effective in targeting poor attendance. Specifically, Check & Connect is an empirically supported intervention designed to enhance student engagement at school and with learning. “Check” includes close monitoring of student performance and progress indicators, and “connect” includes individualized attention to students in partnership with school personnel, family members, and community service providers.<sup>26</sup>

The basic intervention includes structured discussions between “monitor” (mentor/case worker) and student at least twice per month for high school students and once per week for elementary and middle school students. The program is designed for all school-aged children (K-12), for students in regular education or special education, community-based programs serving youth with truancy issues, youth in juvenile justice system, or youth in foster care. Check & Connect also has optional intensive interventions, which include three areas of additional support: problem-solving, academic support, and recreational and community service exploration. With all students, there is an emphasis on family outreach and collaboration between home and school. Monitors are also armed with a set of intensive interventions, which include transition planning,

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<sup>26</sup> [http://checkandconnect.umn.edu/docs/WWC\\_Check\\_Connect\\_092106.pdf](http://checkandconnect.umn.edu/docs/WWC_Check_Connect_092106.pdf)

morning phone calls, and rides to school, among others (Wimmer, 2013, p. 68-69)<sup>27</sup>. Because research has shown that having an adult mentor is an important protective factor for at-risk students (Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention), at the heart of Check & Connect is providing a “positive, supportive relationship with an adult” (Kotering and Christenson, 2009 as cited in Wimmer, 2013, p. 67). One example of a community-based organization (CBO) that has integrated Check & Connect into their existing program is *Treehouse* in King County, Washington. This program works with foster kids in grades 6-12 and contains an education project called Graduation Success. Most notable about *Treehouse*’s integration of Check & Connect is that many of their mentors, or “educational specialists,” are also nonschool-based, and despite this notable difference from the original Check & Connect model, *Treehouse* has implemented it with full fidelity.

This type of model explicitly targets student engagement and accountability that may be important for both elementary and middle school youth involved in the SUSO intervention. While a single model or type of intervention should be viewed as the answer to addressing truancy, OVSJG may benefit from considering a less intensive ‘light touch’ approach towards monitoring youth attendance and linking youth to services as needed.

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<sup>27</sup> Wimmer, M. (2013). Evidenced-Based practices for school refusal and truancy. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

**Appendix A: List of Treatment and Comparison Schools by CBO**

schid	SCHOOLS	ward	Grades Needed Based on Yr 3 Referrals	Associated CBO	schid	SCHOOLS * = New School for Year 3	ward
107	Langley Education Campus	5	K-5	Boys Town	108	Peabody Elementary	6
109	Barnard Elementary	4	K-5	Boys Town	127	Brent Elementary	6
140	Burrville Elementary	7	K-5	Boys Town	163	Turner ES*	8
110	Garrison Elementary	2	K-5	Boys Town	172	Burroughs Education Campus	5
105	Noyes Education Campus	5	K-5	Boys Town	134	Brightwood Education Campus	4
126	Walker-Jones Education Campus	6	K-8	Boys Town	126		
125	Aiton Elementary School	7	K-5	East River	165	Ludlow-Taylor ES	6
120	C.W. Harris Elementary	7	K-5	East River	164	King Elementary School*	8
135	Drew Elementary School	7	K-5	East River	170	Mann Elementary School	3
123	Houston Elementary School	7	K-5	East River	166	Beers Elementary School	7
121	Nalle Elementary	7	K-5	East River	121		
147	Plummer Elementary	7	K-5	East River	147		
145	Thomas Elementary	7	K-5	East River	145		
157	Eliot-Hine Middle School	6	6 to 8	East River	172	Burroughs Education Campus	5
139	Kelly Miller MS	7	6 to 8	East River	101	Langdon Education Campus	5
159	Sousa Middle School	7	6 to 8	East River	159		
179	Smothers ES	7	K-5	East River	162	Garfield ES	8
119	Bruce Monroe Elementary	1	K-5	CSC	119		
115	Cleveland Elementary	1	K-5	CSC	114	Seaton Elementary	6
111	H.D. Cooke Elementary	1	K-5	CSC	111		
117	Marie Reed Elementary	1	K-5	CSC	117		
146	Orr Elementary	8	K-5	CSC	164	King ES	8
152	Stanton Elementary	8	K-5	CSC	163	Beers Elementary*	7
113	Tubman Elementary	1	K-5	CSC	176	Hardy Middle School	2
136	Columbia Heights EC	1	6 to 8	CSC	101	Langdon Education Campus	5
169	Moten ES	8	K-5	CSC	180	Patterson ES*	8

**Attachment 4**  
Choice Research Associates

schid	SCHOOLS	ward	Grades Needed Based on Yr 3 Referrals	Associated CBO	schid	SCHOOLS *New School for Year 3	ward
132	Amidon-Bowen Elementary	6	K-5	E/BFSC	133	Randle Highlands Elementary	7
128	J.O. Wilson Elementary	6	K-5	E/BFSC	129	Maury Elementary	6
144	Miner Elementary	6	K-5	E/BFSC	163	Turner Elementary	8
130	Browne Education Campus	5	K-8	E/BFSC	102	Brookland Education Campus	5
138	Jefferson MS	6	6 to 8	E/BFSC	138		
143	Malcolm X Elementary	8	K-5	Far Southeast	162	Garfield ES	8
148	Savoy Elementary	8	K-5	Far Southeast	166	Beers ES	7
151	Simon Elementary	8	K-5	Far Southeast	180	Patterson ES	8
137	Charles Hart MS	8	6 to 8	Far Southeast	176	Hardy Middle School*	2
160	Ketcham ES	8	K-5	Far Southeast	161	Kimball ES*	7
171	Kramer MS	8	6 to 8	Far Southeast	176	Hardy Middle School*	2
158	Johnson Middle School	8	6 to 8	Far Southeast	158		
181	Hendley Elementary School	8	K-5	Far Southeast	180	Patterson ES*	8
149	Sharpe Health School	4	K-5	Georgia Avenue	161		
153	Takoma Education Campus	4	K-8	Georgia Avenue	168	Hyde-Addison Elementary School	2
154	Truedell Education Campus	4	1-8	Georgia Avenue	178	Raymond Education Campus	4
155	West Education Campus	4	K-8	Georgia Avenue	167	Thomson Elementary	2
156	Whittier Education Campus	4	K-8	Georgia Avenue	156		
150	Shepherd Elementary	4	K-5	Georgia Avenue	150	Kimball ES	7
142	LaSalle-Backus Elementary	4	K-8	Georgia Avenue	142		
116	Payne Elementary	6	K-5	Catholic Charities	118	Tyler Elementary	6
141	Stuart-Hobson MS	6	6 to 8	Catholic Charities	141		
112	Watkins Elementary	6	K-5	Catholic Charities	112		
106	Wheatley Education Campus	5	K-8	Catholic Charities	102	Brookland Education Campus	5

**Project Safe Neighborhoods Youth Violence and  
Homicide Prevention Initiative in Washington, D.C.**

*Outcome Evaluation Report for the U.S. Attorney's Office*

June 2016

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## Executive Summary

This report documents the outcome evaluation results of a Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) project implemented in Washington, D.C. PSN is a multi-agency and collaborative crime prevention initiative established in 2001, led by the U.S. Department of Justice and administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. PSN aims to reduce gun violence through strategies rooted in enforcement, deterrence, and prevention using both an intelligence-led approach and by addressing violent crime at places through problem-solving.

This PSN initiative in Washington, D.C. (herein, “PSN-DC”) was implemented in the Sixth Police District of Ward 7 from January to the end of September of 2015 by Collaborative Solutions for Communities (CSC), a community organization formally known as the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative. The initial goal of PSN-DC was to target youth at high risk for violence, victimization, and gang involvement within police service areas (PSAs) 601, 602, and 608. Although the initial plan for the program was to combine gang suppression efforts with outreach efforts and provision of social services to high-risk youth and their families, the program as implemented focused on the latter two elements, primarily emphasizing a family-focused approach to violence intervention and prevention. Leveraging various community resources, CSC identifies high-risk young people between 14 and 24 years of age and their families, intervenes before retaliatory or future violence might occur, and assists families, schools, and neighborhood residents to identify and take ownership of solutions to immediate concerns of violence. When possible, CSC outreach workers also implemented restorative justice approaches and family group counseling.

The area-level impacts of PSN-DC were mixed. Although CSC tried to contain their efforts in the targeted PSN areas, the needs of the community as well as the connections between violence in other communities and the targeted PSAs drew CSC staff to other locations. Crime appears to have declined in the treatment PSAs (601, 602, and 608), and the treatment PSAs generally improved relative to well-matched comparison areas. However, crime also declined in the rest of the Sixth District PSAs (i.e., 603, 604, 605, 606, and 607) during the intervention. This may indicate that the crime decline in the PSN areas reflects a localized trend in the Sixth District that may or may not be linked to the PSN intervention. Results were also variable across the treatment PSAs, with some having more positive results than others.

It is important to note that the emphasis of the CSC efforts on individuals rather than areas, combined with the lack of a coordinated suppression effort from law enforcement authorities, makes it harder to demonstrate area-level effects from this PSN intervention. Outcomes may prove to be more promising for individual youth and families that received CSC services. Although Project Safe Neighborhoods requires an outcome evaluation of the impact of the intervention on violent crime at the area or neighborhood level (which is the focus of this report), a separate analysis of how the program affected individual clients is being conducted

by another PSN-DC research partner for an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention project (see 2010-PB-FX-K010).

Implementing community outreach and family-centered prevention approaches is challenging in places with high levels of violent crime. At the same time, while police enforcement efforts can be effective, they can also be short-lived. Combining law enforcement efforts directed at serious crimes and gang activity with outreach activities to target high-risk youth with services and support can be promising. Thus, future PSN projects in Washington D.C. should focus on strengthening the coordination and integration of law enforcement and community outreach efforts like those of CSC to sustain violence reduction in these places. PSN teams can facilitate the much-needed information exchange and accountability infrastructure needed for community groups and police agencies to work together successfully. While this study cannot definitively conclude that PSN-DC efforts led to the crime reduction observed in the targeted areas, the mixed results warrant future investigation of PSN projects that include community outreach and family-focused prevention efforts like those undertaken by CSC.

## Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) in Washington DC

### The Project Safe Neighborhoods Initiative

This report documents the outcome evaluation results of a Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) project implemented in Washington, D.C. in 2015 (herein, “PSN-DC”). Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a multi-agency and collaborative crime prevention initiative established in 2001, led by the U.S. Department of Justice and administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance.<sup>1</sup> PSN aims to reduce gun violence through strategies rooted in enforcement, deterrence, and prevention using local partnerships under the leadership of a U.S. Attorney’s Office. In addition to a collaborative approach, PSN initiatives tend to be intelligence-led (see Ratcliffe, 2004), addressing geographic concentrations of violent crime through a wide variety of problem-solving methods (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2004).

The roots of the Project Safe Neighborhood program are in past programs that showed early successes in gun crime prevention—in particular the Operation Ceasefire program in Boston. Operation Ceasefire was designed to use both enforcement and social services on a small number of gang-involved individuals who were responsible for a significant amount of violence in neighborhoods (Kennedy et al., 1996). These approaches were also referred to as a “pulling levers” approach, in that all possible approaches were deployed to reduce violence, including reaching out to gangs, increasing the certainty and severity of punishments, and also providing more resources through gang intervention workers, probation and parole, and other community groups (see Braga et al., 2001; Braga et al., 2014; Kennedy, 1996, 2011; Piehl et al., 2003). To accomplish this goal, teams of researchers, law enforcement practitioners, and community stakeholders worked together (see Braga et al., 2014; McGarrell et al., 2006).

The positive results from Operation Ceasefire in reducing youth homicides in Boston motivated the U.S. Department of Justice to fund PSN task forces and other similar initiatives (e.g., the Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI) and Richmond’s Project Exile; see Bynum, Grommon, and McCluskey, 2014 for more information). Many of the ceasefire and pulling levers approaches emphasized focused deterrence and enforcement, and were associated with reductions in gun violence and youth homicide (see, e.g., the Boston, Indianapolis, and Minneapolis experiences as discussed by McGarrell et al., 2006; see also the Detroit experience evaluated by Bynum and Varano, 2003). Some of these approaches were also balanced by expressions of concern for youth and the deployment of community resources and services.

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.bja.gov/programdetails.aspx?program\\_id=74](https://www.bja.gov/programdetails.aspx?program_id=74) .

Although PSN initiatives may vary by types of interventions and levels of success, they are marked by five core principles or components (see Bynum, Grommon, & McCluskey, 2014). These include:

- 1) Partnerships or collaboration among law enforcement, correctional agencies, judicial agencies, city or local government, social service agencies, community organizations, and a research team;
- 2) Strategic planning, which involves the core team developing a specific strategy to address gun violence. This planning phase is usually data driven and involves ongoing data analysis to allow for modifications, accordingly;
- 3) Training, which occurs during implementation and is meant to assist task forces with implementation of the PSN components;
- 4) Outreach to publicly disseminate a deterrence-based message to potential offenders. This is usually done through local media or similar mediums; and
- 5) Accountability for the behavior of offenders as well as for project accountability, where participating districts are responsible for implementing their part of the PSN initiative.

The District of Columbia has implemented PSN initiatives since the program's inception in 2001. Unfortunately, D.C. has historically suffered from high levels of serious gun-related violence compared with other urban centers in the United States. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports, the District's violent crime rate is over three times the national average.<sup>2</sup> Although D.C. did experience a decline in robbery and homicide at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has recently seen an upsurge in homicides, rapes, and assaults. During the period of this PSN project alone (2015), homicides in the District increased by 54%.<sup>3</sup>

However, as with many cities and towns in the United States, crime is not randomly or equitably distributed in the District. Instead, crime geographically clusters, and usually at the micro-place level (Sherman et al., 1989; Sherman and Weisburd, 1995; Weisburd et al., 2004). For example, between 2011 and 2014, the Sixth Police District of Ward 7, where the currently reported PSN project ("PSN-DC") occurs, experienced 20% of the District's violence. The specific areas targeted by PSN-DC—police service areas (PSAs) 601, 602, and 608—accounted for 42% of the total violent crime in the Sixth District. Furthermore, violence was highly concentrated within individual street segments in PSA 601, 602, and 608. From 2014 to mid-2015, 50% of PSA 601's violence could be found in just 11 street blocks; in PSA 602, 38 blocks, and in PSA 608, another 38 blocks (see Figure 1).

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr>.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://mpdc.dc.gov/page/district-crime-data-glance>.