



# Gangs in Schools Task Force: 2012 Summary Report

## Background

In 2007, the Legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill (SSB) 5097, which required the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to convene a task force to examine how gangs affect school safety. The task force was directed to outline methods for preventing new gangs, eliminating existing gangs, gathering intelligence, and sharing information about gang activities. The task force was also directed to annually report its findings and recommendations to the education committees of the Legislature. In 2008, 2009, and 2010, the Gangs in Schools Task Force submitted legislative reports that included seven recommendations. In 2011, the task force chose to approach our legislative report differently, outlining three primary areas of activity: data, policy guidance, and training. During 2012, the task force focused its work on each of these areas.

[Substitute Senate  
Bill 5097](#)

(2007)

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## Summary

### Current Reality of Gang Activity in Schools

In earlier versions of this report, the task force indicated that gang activity in schools was on the increase. In preparing the 2011 report, we looked at several potential sources of data, and determined that it is unclear about the state of gang activity levels in Washington schools. Anecdotal data from both community law enforcement and security resource officers (SROs) and newspaper accounts indicate that gang activity in schools and communities is on the increase. However, results from the Healthy Youth Survey and other student surveys show a steady decline in student-reported gang involvement since 2006.

National trends have reported an expansion of street gang activity and have recognized the increasing use of technology in gang recruitment and activity, and in some instances, gangs using younger and younger children to assist in criminal activity. The [National Crime Prevention Council](#) identified five different types of gangs: traditional, business/for-profit, hate, copy-cat, and delinquent social gangs. These distinctions are important as we recognize that gang activity in schools overlaps with gang activity on the street, but that the two cannot be addressed in the same ways. However, in Washington, there is no solid data or reporting systems around gang activity in schools. One reason for this is a lack of clear, definitive policy guidance around gang

activity in schools. Without clear definitions and policy, it is difficult to develop effective training for school staff and school community. As a result, during 2012, the task force focused on the three interrelated activity areas: data and information sharing, policy guidance, and training efforts.

### **Data and Information Sharing Update**

The task force began the work of establishing valid Washington State gangs in schools activity data collection. Working with the Healthy Youth Survey and Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS), we are working to create better survey questions and statewide data collection processes. During 2012, the task force did the following:

1. Identified 8 potential questions to include on the 2014 Healthy Youth Survey, which relate to youth gang affiliation and activity.
2. Began the conversation with CEDARS to include gathering gang-activity-in-school-related data.
3. Considered and shared the [King County Resource Guide on Information Sharing](#) as a model for information sharing across agencies. Generated a consistent set of definitions and talking points to be used in cross-agency conversations.
4. Shared the successful community-based [Yakima County Juvenile Gang Court](#) program, a holistic, four-phase program of interventions for youth who want out of the gang lifestyle.
5. Used the OSPI [Safety Center Web site](#) as a clearinghouse for information on research, best practice programs, resources, and effective community-based efforts.

### **Policy Guidance Update**

Rather than create a statewide policy for local districts to adopt, we examined local, regional, and national policies and guidance for dealing with gang activity in schools. We used this information to draft policy guidance that districts and communities might use. The task force is currently in the process of finalizing draft guidance to districts in developing their own policies and procedures relative to gang activity and its impact on school environment and safety. Included are definitions and identification criteria for recognizing gang activity within a school setting.

When finalized, this guidance can be used by districts to create their own gang activity in schools policies. It is expected that the policies would be accompanied by a detailed set of model procedures and training elements including, but not limited to, awareness, recognition, prevention, and intervention activities.

### **Training and Professional Development Update**

Never before have school administrators and other school staff had more demands on their time. The task force continues to work with the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP), the Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC), and other organizations to improve job-embedded professional development related to awareness about and prevention of gang activity. The task force has a set of training materials for educators, offered through the CJTC. Advertised through the CJTC and OSPI, the first of these training modules on gang recognition and awareness was presented on November 7, 2011, with more than 70 attendees.

The table below is a summary of the gang-related trainings offered through CJTC and OSPI during 2011 and 2012.

### Training Summary

Topic	Trainer	Date	Audience/Organization
Basic Gang Awareness	Randy Town	Aug. 1, 2011	Western Assoc. of Campus Law Enforcement Admin (WACLEA)
Basic Gang I.D. Training	Sgt. Dave Cortez, Yakima Police Dept.	Nov. 7, 2011	Yakima
10 Tactical Tips for Dealing with Gang Members	Randy Town	Jan. 29, 2012	Yakima School District—Security
Personal Safety & Gang I.D. Training	Randy Town	Feb. 22, 2012	Yakima School District—Early Learning
Gang I.D. training	Randy Town	Mar. 5, 2012	Wilson Middle School Staff—Yakima
Gang I.D. training	Randy Town	June 27, 2012	Naches Community Organization
Gang I.D. training	Randy Town; Chris Zimmer	June 27, 2012	Mt. Vernon High School
Gang I.D. Training	Randy Town	Aug. 10, 2012	WACLEA, Kirkland
Gangs & Drugs in School	Randy Town	Aug. 13, 2012	School Office Professionals

Insofar as training time is a concern for educators, the task force is looking at alternative ways in which this critical training component can be delivered. Among the possibilities are the development of DVDs and the use of social media, such as YouTube.

### Next Steps

In 2013, the Gangs in Schools Task Force will:

1. Continue working on the specific activities to implement the three areas discussed in the report.
2. Establish a timeline for the year.
3. Identify stakeholders to participate in the activities. The stakeholders will represent the educational, legal, law enforcement, community, and other entities mentioned throughout the report.
4. Identify outcomes and indicators of success for schools.
5. Continue to use the [OSPI Web site](#) as a clearinghouse to share information, data, resources, and success stories.

## **Implications for the Legislature**

Given the significant work ahead, the Gangs in Schools Task Force have three recommendations to forward to the Legislature:

1. Provide funding to support the work of the Gangs in Schools Task Force. Task force members come from all corners of Washington. Although some communications and some of the work can be done virtually, it is also important for task force members to meet face-to-face periodically. However, many members are not able to fully participate due to lack of funding. In addition, there are staff costs related to the administrative support required to move the work forward. Therefore, the task force recommends that funding be allocated to support the work of the task force itself.
2. Provide funding for innovative, community-based programs and promising practices. Community based programs such as the Yakima County Juvenile Gang Court and the Sunnyside Community Center Clean-up Program have shown promise and the potential for replication. Therefore, the task force recommends that funding be allocated to support the work of promising, community-based efforts.
3. Finally, the task force continues to recognize the importance of wrap-around educational services for students who are suspended or expelled for gang activity. Therefore, it also recommends a dedicated apportionment for transition/re-entry programs for adjudicated youth.

The members of the executive steering committee of the Gangs in Schools Task Force thank the Legislature for the opportunity to work on this critical issue.

## **For More Information**

For more information regarding the Gangs in Schools Task Force, please see the [School Safety Center/Gangs in Schools](#) or contact Mike Donlin, Program Supervisor, at (360) 725-6044 or [mike.donlin@k12.wa.us](mailto:mike.donlin@k12.wa.us).