

## Section 1: Identification of Risk and Protective Factors

### *What Are Risk Factors?*

The terms “risk” and “at risk” have become so widely utilized that it is sometimes difficult to determine what *risk* implies. For some it connotes a potentially negative state of being; for others it offers a well-defined point of entry for the delivery of services. In either case, the term *risk* leads practitioners to consider needs and strategies to foster the well-being of youth.

The field of prevention, while relatively young, has progressed through various stages of development in the identification and implementation of strategies designed to decrease the incidence of destructive behaviors in youth. These strategies, including the acquisition of knowledge, the enhancement of self esteem, and the provisions of life skills, repeatedly fall short of the desired goal: the prevention of harmful and/or destructive behavior patterns in youth.

The 1980’s gave rise to the concept of *risk factors*, based on research identifying the conditions underlying problems of alcohol and other drug use, teen pregnancy, delinquency, violence, and school drop outs. While these conditions are not seen as causal factors in the development of destructive behaviors, they are believed to be influences which increase the likelihood of an individual engaging in such behaviors. Since we know that many children who experience risk never engage in destructive behaviors, we cannot assume that there is a cause-effect relationship.

Risk factors exist in various *domains*, sometimes called key systems (Hawkins, 1985), including the peer group, family, school and community. The characteristics and influences that exist in each of these domains shape an individual’s experience in life. In addition, there are a number of individual risk factors or personality traits, including genetic predispositions, that may also place a child at risk, including attitudes, intellectual ability, and social ability. **Table 1** outlines each of the domains and the associated risk factors. Individual and peer risk factors have been combined, since they include many of the same indicators.

School staff can use the information on risk factors to identify student needs and assess the ability of the school to address those needs. If there is a preponderance of early academic failure among students, for example, then the school staff must recognize this as a school risk factor as well as a possible community risk factor. The assessment of risk and associated student needs provides school staff with a solid foundation to move forward to address those needs.

**Table 1**  
**Risk Factors**

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Risk Factor</b>
Individual/Peer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alienation/Rebelliousness</li> <li>• Friends Who Engage in Problem Behavior</li> <li>• Favorable Attitude Toward Problem Behavior</li> </ul>
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Management Problems</li> <li>• Family Conflict</li> <li>• Family History of Problem Behavior</li> </ul>
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Academic Failure</li> <li>• Early Conduct Problems</li> <li>• Lack of Commitment to School/School Affiliation</li> <li>• Lack of Clear Policies at School</li> </ul>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of Drugs/or Weapons</li> <li>• Community Laws and Norms Favorable Toward Problem Behavior</li> <li>• Low Neighborhood Attachment and Community Disorganization</li> <li>• Severe Economic Deprivation</li> </ul>

*What Are Protective Factors?*

The concept of *protective factors* was instrumental in shifting the focus from what’s wrong with youth to what can be done to facilitate the healthy development of youth. Protective factors have been described as the “personal, social and institutional resources that promote successful adolescent development or buffer risk factors that might otherwise compromise development” (Garmezy and Rutter 1985). This departure characterized a shift from a “deficit model” to a “competency model” of child development.

Based on the work of Norman Garmezy, Emmy Werner, Michael Rutter, Bonnie Bernard, J. David Hawkins and others, protective factors have been identified as the conditions that foster the development of *resiliency* in youth. These are the factors that “facilitate the development of youth who do not get involved in the life-compromising problems of school failure, drugs, etc.” (Bernard, 1991).

While researchers have identified protective factors in differing terms, three *key protective factors* described by Bonnie Bernard are commonly referred to in the literature. Two additional approaches to protective factors are outlined in Section 2 of this manual. Benard’s factors, listed below, are the conditions necessary to mitigate or buffer the effects of risk:

- **Caring and Support**
- **High Expectations**
- **Opportunities for Meaningful Participation**

**Table 2** lists the conditions that promote protective factors in schools. While these conditions might also exist in the other domains of risk, it is in the school domain that we will be focusing most of our efforts. The greater the number of protective factors existing in the key systems affecting children, the more likely they are to develop resiliency.

***Table 2***  
***Protective Factors***

<b>Protective Factor</b>	<b>Conditions</b>
Caring and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurturing Staff and Positive Role Models</li> <li>• Creative, Supportive School Leadership</li> <li>• Peer Support, Cooperation, and Mentoring</li> <li>• Personal Attention and Interest from Teachers</li> <li>• Warm, Responsive School Climate</li> </ul>
High Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum Mastery of Basic Skills</li> <li>• Emphasis on Higher Order Academics</li> <li>• Avoidance of Negative Labeling and Tracking</li> </ul>
Opportunities for Meaningful Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership and Decision-Making by Students</li> <li>• Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities</li> <li>• Parent and Community Participation in Instruction</li> <li>• Culturally Diverse Curricula and Experiences</li> </ul>

### *What is Resiliency?*

Resiliency has been defined as the ability to bounce back from or withstand major and multiple life stresses. It is the capacity to thrive despite adversity - to overcome the odds. A resilient child might be depicted as surrounded by an invisible shield as he or she navigates life's inevitable stresses. This "shield" is developed over time and grows out of nurturing, participatory relationships with adults who expect the best of and for them.

It has been said that a resilient child is one who "lives well, plays well, and works well" (Garmezy, 1985). Resilient individuals have been described as having healthy expectancies, a sense of optimism, internal locus of control, problem-solving skills, self-discipline, and a sense of humor (Garmezy 1985, Rutter 1979, Seligman 1992, Werner 1988 and Wolin 1993).

Bonnie Benard characterizes resilient individuals as having the following attributes:

- **Social Competence**  
Includes the qualities of responsiveness, flexibility, empathy and caring, communication skills, sense of humor, and other prosocial behaviors.
- **Problem Solving**  
Includes the ability to think abstractly, reflectively, and flexibly and to attempt alternate solutions for both cognitive and social problems.
- **Autonomy/Independence**  
Describes having a sense of one's own identify, an ability to act independently and exert some control over one's environment.
- **Sense of Purpose and Future**  
Includes healthy expectancies, goal directedness, achievement orientation, hopefulness, persistence, and a belief in a bright future.

Just as there are specific *indicators* to identify the presence of risk factors and protective factors, there are methods for identifying the presence of *resiliency attributes* in students. The following list includes assessments designed to measure the degree of competence in individuals.

#### *The Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS; Hightower et al., 1986)*

Assesses behaviors within two domains: Problems (Acting Out, Shy-Anxious, and Learning) and Adjustment (Frustration Tolerance, Assertive Social Skills, and Task Orientation).

#### *The Revised Class Play (RCP; Masten, Morison & Pellegrini, 1985)*

Assesses peer reputation and includes items which fall in three major areas: Aggressive-Disruptive, Sensitive-Isolated, and Sociability-Leadership.

*The Social Skills Inventory* (SSI; Riggio & Throckmorton, 1986)

Includes items on each of the following dimensions: emotional expressivity, sensitivity, and control; and social expressivity, sensitivity, and control.

*The Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale* (Nowicki and Strickland, 1973)

Measures the extent to which children attribute events to external vs. internal causes.

While school staff observations of student performance and behavior provide a good place to begin to identify the presence or absence of resiliency attributes, sound assessment includes objective measures such as those listed above. Once school staff members are able to identify the risk factors, protective factors, and resiliency factors present in the students and school, they can begin to consider strategies to promote the healthy development of children.

It should be noted that resiliency is an essential characteristic for *all* individuals to possess. While the ability to overcome risk is the defining feature of a resilient individual, some children and adults have not yet encountered significant risk factors in their lives. Does this mean that we should not focus our protective strategies on these individuals as well? The answer is a resounding “no.” Since one can never predict the onset of a stressful life event or series of events, it is incumbent upon those of us who are the “practitioners” of resiliency-building to focus our efforts on all individuals within the school population.



## Section 2: Link between Risk and Protective Factors and School Performance

*What do risk and protective factors have to do with school performance?*

The research on risk and protective factors is invaluable to schools as they attempt to provide arenas where children can and want to learn. Although there are many significant studies on risk and protective factors, one is specific to school and student outcome and is widely recognized as a landmark study. The study and its conclusion by noted British psychiatrist Michael Rutter, are provided in the book, *Fifteen Thousand Hours*. For almost a dozen years during a formative period of their development, children spend almost as much of their waking life at school as at home. Altogether this works out at some *15,000 hours* (from the age of five until leaving school).

Do a child's experiences at school have any effect; does it matter *which* school he attends; and do the organizational and functional features of the school matter? These are the issues which gave rise to the study of 12 London secondary schools described in this book. The research findings provide a clear "yes," in response to the first two questions. Schools do indeed have an important impact on children's development and it does matter which school a child attends. Moreover, the results provide "strong indications of the particular features of school organization and functioning which make for success" (Rutter, 1979).

After collecting and reviewing the data of the 12 London schools, Rutter found good outcomes for students were not due to size of school, age of buildings, broad differences in administrative status or organization (Rutter, 1979). After taking into account all the differences in abilities of students, he found that the differences between schools in outcomes were systematically related to their characteristics as *social institutions*. Factors as varied as "the degree of academic emphasis, teacher actions in lessons, good conditions for pupils, and the extent to which children were able to take responsibility were all significantly associated with outcome differences between schools" (Rutter, 1979). All of the factors acted in a way to create a set of values, attitudes and behaviors which become characteristic of the school as a whole. We recognize this as *climate* or *culture* in a school.

Rutter also found that:

- frequent disciplinary interventions were linked with more disruptive behavior; conversely pupil behavior was better when teachers used ample praise
- teachers who spotted disruptive behavior early and dealt with it appropriately and firmly with the minimum of interference had good results and did not lose students' attention
- high expectations meant good academic performance and good behavior
- tasks of responsibility given to children resulted in better behavior

- students were affected negatively by poor teacher role models and positively by good teacher role models
- it is important that all children have some success and positive feedback, but it must be genuine
- when staff acted together in the areas of what was taught (curriculum) and how students were governed (behavior), there was better attendance and better behavior

All through the resiliency literature we see an emphasis on an environment with certain characteristics/processes/resources that lead to positive outcomes for children. The work of Werner, Garmezy, Masten, Hawkins, and others has shown what many practitioners have learned from experience: *schools and other social institutions can and do help buffer the effects of risk factors on adolescent development*. The conditions in schools, characterized by the following three contexts, might benefit from a new look using risk and protective factors as a lens.

1. How we view our students and what we want for them
2. The culture or climate of our schools
3. What we teach and how we teach it
4. How we view our students

There isn't a day that goes by where we don't hear the words "at risk". We have been taught to examine children for their deficits so that they can receive free or reduced lunch, special education services, other special learning environments, and on and on. Are we wrong? Yes and no.

We can see the importance of continually trying to address risk factors because children do come from situations uniformly viewed as disadvantaged. Yet schools cannot assume this burden alone. We want children to be fed, housed, supervised, immunized and nurtured. The difficulty of forming and maintaining collaborations with families and communities has stymied many schools. The continued focus on risk factors and societal ills has caused "burn out" among educators.

Harold Hodgkinson, the eminent demographer and Director of the Center for Demographic Policy, Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, D.C., tells us that schools can do all the reform that they like, but until we acknowledge the "spectacular changes that have occurred in the nature of the children who come to school (and the associated risk factors) we will not have real reform" (Hodgkinson, 1991). According to Hodgkinson, the following two questions must be addressed by educators before our schools will improve:

1. What can educators do that they are not already doing to reduce the number of children "at risk" in America and to get them achieving well in school settings?

2. How can educators collaborate more closely with other service providers so that we all work together toward the urgent goal of providing services to the same client (students)?

Linda Winfield, a UCLA professor and resiliency researcher, suggests that schools need to pay greater attention to children's inherent strengths and abilities and downplay their inadequacies. Here we might use inventories of student learning styles, and then try to give students opportunities to learn in that style. This confirms Rutter's research that every child needs to feel success. Using Norman Garmezy's competence indices, we could examine students for these predictors of resiliency and support them:

- Effectiveness in work, play, love
- Healthy expectations and a positive outlook
- Self-esteem and internal locus of control
- Self-discipline
- Problem-solving and critical thinking skills and humor

Michael Rutter would like children to have "...a sense of self-esteem and efficacy, a feeling of your own worth, as well as feeling that you can deal with things, that you can control what happens to you...[Y]ou need good relationships and security in those relationships...[C]hildren need to be adaptable to learn to cope with changing circumstance...[C]hildren need some experience with what is now talked about as social-problem solving" (Pines, 1984).

For these reasons, educators are optimistic as other researchers and practitioners are attempting to shift from the "risk factor" focus to a "protective factor, resiliency enhancing" focus. The researchers are showing educators what they believe to be a more hopeful and promising approach.

## **2. The culture or climate of our schools**

Much has been written about "Effective Schools" and the characteristics of such schools. These characteristics in Larry Lezotte's model are:

- Strong instructional leadership
- A clear and focused mission
- A climate of high expectations for success for all students
- A safe, orderly environment
- The opportunity to learn and adequate time spent on academic tasks
- Frequent monitoring of student progress
- Positive home and school relations

(Lezotte, 1990)

For our purposes, we will focus on the **culture** of the school or “the way we do things around here.” Purkey and Smith define it as “those aspects of the school that generally reflect or structure the guiding beliefs and daily behavior of staff and students” (Purkey, Smith 1985).

Purkey and Smith’s 13 characteristics of a good school culture are

1. School site management and democratic decision-making
2. Leadership
3. Staff stability
4. Curriculum articulation and organization
5. Staff development
6. Parental involvement and support
7. School recognition of academic success
8. Maximized learning time
9. District support
10. Collaborative planning and collegial relationships
11. Sense of community
12. Commonly shared clear goals and high expectations
13. Order and discipline

These characteristics (or others like them) become the means by which student performance is improved. These can be “protective factors,” if operational. We know that good school culture doesn’t fall from the sky. We also know that good culture positively affects student behavior and achievement.

This suggests that the provision of the three main protective factors, *Caring and Support*, *High Expectations*, and *Meaningful Participation*, can become the guideposts for changing school culture into an atmosphere where good student performance is a reality. These three protective factors identified by Bonnie Benard, contain most, if not all, of the commonly known characteristics of a positive school culture.

### **Caring and Support**

This includes conveying “compassion, understanding, respect, and interest grounded in listening, and the establishment of safety and basic trust” (Benard, 1991).

In her 30-year study of children of Kauai, Emmy Werner found that the most frequently encountered positive role model, outside of the family, was a favorite teacher who was not just an instructor for academic skills, but also a confidant and model for personal identification.

The “connection” of staff members to students can also demonstrate caring and support when teachers look to collaborate with agencies, families, and community to support children.

### **What does caring and support look like when we live it?**

We are available to listen.

We are nonjudgmental.

We reassure children.

We show kindness.

We assist children in generating possible solutions for problems.

We express enjoyment at having spent time in their company.

We are sensitive to the situations in which children are growing up.

We have children work collaboratively, not competitively.

We understand that sometimes the relationship is - adult is giver, child is recipient.

### **High Expectations**

School effectiveness research shows the importance of positive and high expectations for school success. “The undermining of youths’ sense of self-efficacy through low expectations communicated at school is the beginning of the insidious process of decreasing motivation and increasing alienation” (Benard, 1992). Researcher Jeff Howard states that “expectancies affect behavior in two basic ways: first they directly affect performance behavior by increasing or decreasing our confidence levels as we approach a task and thus affecting the intensity of effort we’re willing to expend; second, expectations also influence the way we think about or explain our performance...[W]hen people who are confident of doing well at a task are confronted with unexpected failure, they tend to attribute the failure to *inadequate effort*. The likely response to another encounter with the same or similar task is to work harder. People who come to a task expecting to fail, on the other hand, attribute their failure to *lack of abilities*. Once you admit to yourself, in effect, that I don’t have what it takes, you are not likely to approach that task again with great vigor” (Howard and Hammond, 1985).

Howard promotes “directly teaching children that intellectual development is something they can achieve through effort...[T]hink you can, work hard, get smart are messages children must be taught” (Howard, 1990).

Dr. Rhona Weinstein states that teacher-child interactions are “only a piece of the web of low and unequal expectations that is currently institutionalized in schooling practices.” Her *Expectancy Communications Model* looks “beyond patterns of differential teacher-child interaction to include the structure and organization of classroom and school life, which sets the stage for certain kinds of educational and social opportunities.” Weinstein identifies eight features of the instructional *environment* as critical in communicating

expectations to students. In order to create a positive expectancy climate, substantial changes need to be made in the following (adapted from Weinstein, 1991 by Bonnie Benard, 1992):

- *Curriculum* - should include higher-order, more meaningful, more participative tasks
- *Grouping practices* - should be heterogeneous, interest-based, flexible
- *Evaluation system* - should reflect the view of multiple intelligences, multiple approaches, multiple learning styles
- *Motivation* - should use cooperative rather than competitive teaching strategies and focus on intrinsic motivation based on interest
- *Responsibility for learning* - should elicit active student participation and decision making in their learning
- *Teacher-student relations* - should develop individual caring relationships with each student and value diversity
- *Parent-class relations* - should reach out to all parents with positive messages
- *School-class relations* - should provide lots of varying activities for all students' participation, including community service opportunities

In all of the above ways, expectations are communicated to students in their daily lives in school. "Research consistently shows us that 50% to 80% of students with multiple risks in their lives *do* succeed, especially if they experience a caring school environment that conveys high expectations" (Benard, 1992).

### **What does high expectation look like when we live it?**

- We expect children to want to learn; they expect us to choose curriculum for them that is challenging and substantial.
- We follow our rules as we expect children to.
- We expect them to be ready to learn; they expect us to start our lessons on time.
- We expect them to do homework that is meaningful; they expect feedback from us on their work.
- We expect them to be caring and respectful to all persons; they expect us to.
- We expect them to solve their problems; they expect us to show them how and give them practice.

### **Meaningful Participation**

This includes student "opportunities for valued responsibilities, for making decisions, for giving voice and being heard, and for contributing one's talents to the community" (Benard, 1996). Rutter states that schools, by their compulsory nature, create an

atmosphere where students exhibit an “anti-school” attitude. The rules of the school can be interpreted by individual teachers based on their whims; there are many variables that can contribute to an us vs. them climate. We must take care to develop relationships based on student participation (Rutter, 1979).

### **What does meaningful participation look like when we live it?**

- Students learn skills and procedures in the context of meaningful problems and issues.
- Students help to shape school rules and become committed to uphold them.
- Students are taught in a way that helps them see why learning is valuable (they do not need extrinsic rewards).
- Students are encouraged to help give a genuine hand at school, at home, and in the community.

In addition to Benard’s three protective factors area, Michael Rutter offers four protective processes to foster resilience:

- **Reduce negative outcomes** by altering the risk or the child’s exposure to the risk (an example might be when a school works with the community to protect children going to and from school).
- **Reduce the negative chain reaction** following risk exposure (an example might be when additional counseling is provided a child who has been victimized).
- **Establish and maintain self-esteem and self-efficacy** (an example might be when arts activities are integrated into learning units and an artistic or expressive child can show others what he can do).
- **Open up opportunities** for youth (an example is when children become involved in a community-sponsored after-school program/activity or volunteerism).

J. David Hawkins, Ph.D., of Seattle, Washington developed one of the most well-known protective factor models named “The Social Development Strategy.”

# SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

by J. David Hawkins

Hawkins' model includes four protective factors:

- *Bonding* to the conventional group of family, school, community and positive peer group (bonding takes place when children can actively participate).
- *Norms opposed to use* where there is a clear “no use” message about drugs (or other harmful behaviors), where the family, school, peer group, and community all model healthy behaviors.
- Teach the *skills* and provide *opportunities* for their use that children need to have healthy relationships and succeed in school.
- Provisions of *recognition* and reward for using these skills.

Hawkins asserts that children do need skills and they need opportunities to use these social competency skills and be recognized for using them. This assertion is in keeping with other researchers who believe positive, genuine feedback keeps the enthusiasm to use the skills high.

### 3. What we teach and how we teach it

Hank Levin, Professor of Education and Economics at Stanford University, and one of the *New York Times*' nine education “Standard Bearers” (leaders nationally known for educational innovation), has a theory about what we teach students. He believes that what we teach them has to do with how we view them. If we view students as “at risk,” then they need basic skills or remedial work; if we view students as “gifted,” they need hands-on programs and enriching, accelerated work. Levin changed the process so that all students would get the richest experiences. Levin's favorite targets are schools that are

having problems in achievement, safety, and desegregation. He helps schools to change culture from the “inside out.” Is this strategy successful?

Over 300 schools in 25 states use Levin’s “Accelerated Model.” For inner city schools, it sometimes takes a few years to see dramatic results in test scores. **All** 8<sup>th</sup> graders take algebra (after having had 6<sup>th</sup> grade enriched math and 7<sup>th</sup> grade pre-algebra). Levin and others who research “what we teach” show that not only does the content have to match standards of “what a student should know and be able to do,” but it should include the skill processes needed to learn content.

In Kendall and Marzano’s *The Systematic Identification and Articulation of Content Standards and Benchmarks*, elaboration on the competencies included in the SCANS (Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) Report was provided. This is the first time that we have seen such protective content and standards identified as crucial to academic success. For example, on the competency “working with others,” they included the content and levels of competence in the following areas:

- contributes to the overall effort of a group
- uses conflict resolution techniques
- displays effective interpersonal communication skills
- demonstrates leadership skills
- works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations

Under self-regulation, they included:

- sets and manages goals
- performs self-appraisal
- considers risk
- demonstrates perseverance
- maintains a healthy self-concept

If operational, these protective factors become personal resiliencies. The attributes listed are shown to be important in *academic success* as well as in *social development*.

There is a great deal of positive literature about collaborative strategies (cooperative learning, peer mentoring) that educators can use. Many schools have taken the steps to incorporate the best information on how children learn into their strategies. Jeanne Gibbs’ updated *Tribes: A New Way of Learning Together* uses the theories of multiple intelligences, interdisciplinary or thematic instructions, and skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (like getting along with others) in this process of grouping and working together. While *Tribes* delivers on the three protective factors of *Caring and Support*, *High Expectations*, and *Meaningful Participation*, it goes beyond them. It creates a caring community of learners where those sometimes latent resiliency attributes are awakened -

a place where they are of value and valued by the group. While *Tribes* is an example of resiliency research turned into action, each classroom and school has the power to take action by believing that it can, with the help of others, create an environment that mitigates risk, creates and supports protective factors, and awakens and fosters resiliency by focusing on the three specific school contexts:

- how we view our students - deficient or competent, vulnerable or resilient
- how we “do things around here” - the culture in the classroom and school
- what we teach children and how we teach them - the content and the process of instruction

### **Section 3: Link Between Risk and Protective Factors and a Safe Learning Environment**

*Personal Safety: Florida's students will have a safe and secure place in which to learn.*

The Florida Department of Education's Agency Strategic Plan, Strategic Issue 2.0, a Safe Learning Environment, is about creating a culture where good healthy outcomes for children are expected and where physical and psychological safety is assured. Let us look at the most recent approaches to addressing a Safe Learning Environment. Much of the initial risk and protective factor research was conducted in the wake of large-scale substance abuse. The risk factors (**Table 1**) are well known as contributors to the problem behaviors of substance abuse and violence among adolescents. "Studies have proven that the greater the number of risk factors to be found within the total system of school, family, peer group and community, the greater the tendency toward alcohol and drug problems" (Gibbs & Bennett, 1990). Alcohol and drug problems are just part of an interrelated web of negative outcomes for adolescents, such as dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, delinquency, antisocial behavior, *etc.*

Preventionists previously followed a pathology model. If you had an infection, you got an antibiotic. If you had a cut, you got a Bandaid. This strategy never looked at the *underlying* causes and was often based on assumption. The cause is somewhere in the relation between the risk factors and protective factors. Researchers say that "risk and protective factors, whether biological or environmental, represent continuing interactions between the child and the social environment that began at birth, continues over the years into adolescence and transcends socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and family structure" (Steinberg, Mounts, Landborn, & Dorbush, 1990, eds. Robins, Rutter, 1990).

There are two different schools of thought on how best to use the research on risk and protective factors and fostering resiliency. The first is the risk and protective factor approach. Two researchers whose beginning work was in this area of risk and protections are Jeanne Gibbs and Sherrin Bennett. They looked at the risk factors and tried to change them into positive outcomes by finding opposing protective factors. In other words, for each risk factor, there is an identifiable protective factor to balance it so that children are harmed as little as possible by the risks in their lives. They support the use of collaborative teams who identify resources to combat prioritized risk factors and promote protective factors across the four domains. Gibbs' and Bennett's work is based on the research of J. David Hawkins.

The work of Gibbs, Bennett, Hawkins, and others uses this paradigm of reducing risks while strengthening protective factors. Strategies and programming are then selected to reduce or eradicate the risks. At the same time, they focus on protective factors. They see risk and protection/resiliency as two sides of a coin.

The other school of thought, led by Werner, Rutter, Garmezy, and Benard, is that while knowing the risks gives us a sense of the pressures young people face, it does not give a clear course for action. Many children do not succumb to problem behavior despite great risk in their lives. In their book, *Stress, Coping, and Development in Children* Rutter and Garmezy state that "...evidence of resiliency in children under stress is far more ubiquitous a phenomenon than mental health personnel ever realized, largely because of their long-term attention to behavior pathology...[U]ltimately, the potential for prevention surely lies in increasing our knowledge and understanding of reasons why some children are not damaged by deprivation."

This group espouses the creation of protective factors that have been shown to be effective buffers to risk and to support the development of resiliency. The question "Why do some children who come from great disadvantage, neglect, poverty, or abuse manage to succeed in spite of the hardships?" continually reappears. Emmy Werner's Kauai study, while initially focused on risk, found that natural buffers (caring relationships and/or sense of accomplishment), not programs or interventions per se, protected children who had been identified as having four or more risk factors. Rutter, like Werner, while examining risk factors in public schooling, found buffers that were more significant to good outcomes for students than were the risk factors in providing negative outcomes for students.

These theorists advocate nurturing the attributes of resiliency (social competence, problem-solving, autonomy, and sense of purpose and future) and finding, creating, and supporting *situations* or *conditions* in school (and other domains as well) that act as buffers or protective factors for children as they navigate through life. Even with resiliency

attributes acting as personal buffers, we go in and out of resiliency based on the life events we face and our negotiation of them.

It is extremely important to note what these researchers are saying as well as not saying. They are not saying, “Don’t worry about risks.” What they are saying is that we can build protection even in the absence of risk as we never know where or when risks may occur. They are saying that the creation of this protective environment is good in the absence of risk because it fulfills basic human development needs of the children, such as caring and safety.

***How does this information on risk and protective factors assist in achieving a safe learning environment?***

The Florida Department of Education has developed a manual to assist schools as they try to meet the objectives of Strategic Issue 2.0: *Planning Guide: Achieving Safe, Equitable, Healthy and Drug-Free Schools* and *Planning Guide: Supplemental Resources*.

Using the *Planning Guide: Achieving Safe, Equitable, Healthy and Drug-Free Schools* and its companion publication, the *Planning Guide: Supplemental Resources*, schools can begin to create a view of their school or classrooms and will be better able to make good choices based on sound data analysis. The Guide’s introduction offers a look at the expectations for those who work in or collaborate with schools.

*Expert practitioners in school health, safety, and civil rights believe*

1. a healthy and drug-free school promotes student access to services and instruction that ensure the opportunity for total well-being, including success in school. A healthy, drug-free school has a comprehensive school health program and alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs program that encourage healthy lifestyles, strengthen protective factors, and reduce risky behaviors and their consequences.
2. safe and drug-free schools are free of physical or psychological harm and provide disciplined environments where students and staff can effectively learn, work, teach, and grow. Safe and drug-free schools can best be created and maintained through the involvement of all stakeholders within the community.
3. the ideal school will reflect “equity in education when students’ school achievement and participation are not identifiable by the subpopulation (race, gender, *etc.*) to which they belong” (State of Florida, Department of Education).

Each of these descriptors has a protective nature: “strengthens protective factors;” “programs that encourage a healthy lifestyle;” “students and staff can effectively learn, work, teach, and grow;” “all stakeholders;” “equity in education.”

Use of the Guide and the assessments included in *Supplemental Resources* can assist schools in gathering information. The resources are all there. One recommended change is to find a school climate survey that asks “what is” and “what should be.” This manual includes sample questions from a survey from the Northwest Regional Educational

Laboratory (see Section 8: Resources for more information). Additionally, other important data is available through the Florida School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting System available at each school.

Data collection and assessment provide the framework for meeting individual school needs, not national needs. These will substantiate what is believed to be true by staff at a given school. With the help of a good climate survey, staff will be able to focus on areas that stakeholders (teacher, students, parents) have identified as needs. The job will then be to find or create protective factors in the environment to buffer or mitigate identified risk. These protective factors need to encourage the four resiliency attributes (Social Competence, Problem-Solving, Autonomy, and Sense of Purpose and Future) so that they, in turn, act as individual protective factors for students.

Following is a 10-step process to meet **Strategic Issue 2.0 Safe Learning Environment** using a risk factor/protective factor approach:

1. **Assessment** (for both risk and protective factors)

Use assessment instruments in the *Planning Guide: Supplemental Resources* for:

- Equity Issues
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey (high school)
- Youth Gangs Checklist
- School Physical Plant
- Transportation

Other assessment instruments available at school include:

- Discipline Referrals
- Conduct Grades
- Teacher Reports
- Arrest Records
- Achievement Test Scores
- Report Card Grades
- Attendance Records (see additional data sources Table 3, Section 4)
- School Climate Surveys
- Types of Programs Available at School
- Test Scores
- Discipline Records
- Students' After-School Activities
- Cooperative Learning in Classrooms
- Peer Programming Availability
- Student Representation in Policy Decisions
- Parent Volunteers at School
- Active Representation on School Improvement Team
- Student Assistance Program

- Peer Mediation Availability
2. **Determine which risk and protective factors are present at school or in the classroom.**
  3. **Survey for resiliency attributes** (Section 1- Resiliency Assessments)
  4. **Provide information to school community about risk factors, protective factors, and resiliency and how these concepts translate into negative or positive outcomes for children at school, at home, in their peer group, or community.** Staff will need to be trained to create protective environments and nurture resiliency attributes.
  5. **Work with others so staff will both believe in and model what they want for children.**
  6. **Work with other students, administrators, and teachers to determine priority areas and whether a classroom or school-wide model will be utilized.** (Institutionalizing a protective model is most effective across a school where it becomes the culture of the school - it can happen in each classroom, home, peer group, and community.)
  7. **Know the risk factors so that the protective factors can be created or supported to buffer the effects of risk.** (The most promising research is in the area of providing these buffers. The focus can be on proven strategies that are preventive by nature, not reactive. Not all individuals exposed to risk exhibit problem behaviors.) A school may choose to use the risk factor and protective factor approach.
  8. **Create a single school culture based on protective factors.** Make “the way we do things around here” based on Caring and Support, High Expectations, and Meaningful Participation. Make the modeling of them a *lifestyle*. Real, positive outcomes for children and youth come as a result of the environments created for them.
  9. **Take on no new programs that do not match up with these protective factors.** Resources and staff energies will be depleted with the use of conflicting programs or the “identify a risk, find a program” approach.
  10. **Make protective factors (Caring Support, High Expectations, and Meaningful Participation) part of school improvement goals.**

If everyone believes that he or she has the power to create an environment that not only protects children and youth from risk but nurtures and fosters internal strengths (resiliencies), what a place that would be. What teacher wouldn't want to teach there? What child wouldn't want to learn there? What parent wouldn't want to visit there? What community wouldn't be proud of having such a school?



## Section 4: How to Gauge the Presence of Risk and Protective Factors

### *Risk Factor Indicators*

In order for schools to assess the presence of specific risk factors or protective factors, staff must be able to measure their existence, prevalence, and effects. Part one of this document outlined the five domains - individual, family, peer group, school and community in which risks occurs. Within each of these domains, there exists a number of conditions that place an individual at risk. The presence of these conditions can be identified based on observation and *data* collected on specific indicators.

The process of identifying risk factors for an individual or group of individuals can be overwhelming if staff members do not know what it is they are looking for. For this reason, we have broken down each risk factor into the following four parts:

- **Where is it?** > **Domain**
- **What is it?** > **Risk Factor**
- **What will we see?** > **Indicator(s)**
- **How will we know?** > **Data**

Data sources include a variety of activities, documents, and observations that can be found in the community, school district or school center. School staff members are usually skilled and well-practiced in observation, but may need to improve their skills in the collection of formal data. Data collection activities might include surveys, questionnaires and feedback from students, parents, or staff. There are also several sources of existing data that staff should consult in assessing the presence of risk factors. They include:

<b>Community</b>	<b>School District</b>	<b>School Center</b>
Needs Assessments	Comprehensive District Plan	School Improvement Plan
Law Enforcement Records	Dropout Prevention Plan	School Report Card
Juvenile Justice Records	Exceptional Student Education Plan	School Climate Survey
Children’s Organizations Documents	Title I Plan	Discipline Records

**Table 3** summarizes the Domain, Risk Factors, Indicators, and Data to be collected for each of the key systems. School staff should look at the indicators listed for each domain in order to identify what area(s) of risk exists in their school and community. The data sources listed provide staff with resources to collect information regarding the presence of specific risk factors.

**Table 3**  
**Indicators of Risk**

<b>Domain</b> <i>Where is it?</i>	<b>Risk Factor</b> <i>What is it?</i>	<b>Indicator(s)</b> <i>What will we see?</i>	<b>Data</b> <i>How will we know?</i>
<b>Individual/Peer</b>	Alienation/ Rebelliousness	Lack of Bonding Aggressive Behavior Defiance of Authority Delinquent Behavior	Discipline Referral Conduct Grades Teacher Reports Arrest Records
	Friends Who Engage in Problem Behaviors	Substance Abuse School Dropouts Gang Involvement Violent or Criminal Behavior	Arrest Records Substance Abuse Symptoms or Treatment Truancy and Suspension
	Favorable Attitudes Toward Problem Behavior	Gang Emulation Glamorization of Drugs/Violence Support Drug/Violent Activities	Questionnaire Observation of Behavior Parent Reports
<b>Family</b>	Family Management Problems	Lack of Supervision Ineffective Discipline Low Expectations for Success Lack of Bonding and Caring	Latchkey Status Parent Conferences Feedback Family Surveys Family School Affiliation
	Family Conflict	Inconsistent or Harsh Discipline Family Discord or Abuse	Referral to Department of Children and Families Symptoms of Abuse Aggressive/Violent Behavior
	Family History of Problem Behaviors	Parental Alcoholism Parent Criminality or Violence	Parent Conference Feedback Student Records Parent Surveys
	Favorable Parental Attitudes Toward Problem Behavior	Parent Condone Drug Use, Violence, or Delinquent Behavior Parental Drug Use Parental Violent Behavior	Lack of Parent Support of School Policy Lack of Parent Enforcement of Consequences
<b>School</b>	Early Academic Failure	Low Achievement Test Scores Poor Academic Grades Retention	Achievement Test Scores Report Card Grades Cumulative Records
	Lack of Commitment to School/Poor School Affiliation	Excessive Tardiness/Absenteeism Lack of Bonding with Teachers or Peers School Vandalism or Graffiti	Attendance Records Suspension Data Involvement in School Activities Quality of Peer Relationships
	Lack of Clear Policies at School	Repeated Suspensions for Same Infractions Unclear Norms for Drug Use, Violence and/or Weapons	Suspension Data Incidence of Drug Use or Violence Student Handbook School Policy Statement
<b>Community</b>	Availability of Drugs and/or Weapons	Presence of Drug Dealers in the Community Shooting in Community	Arrests for Drug Use/Possession Law Enforcement Data on Shootings
	Community Laws and Norms Favorable Toward Problem Behavior	Inconsistent Enforcement of Laws Drug-Related Community Activities Local Media Portrayal of Drugs and/or Violence	Law Enforcement Data Community Events Local Advertising
	Low Neighborhood Attachment and Community Disorganization	Transitions and Mobility Lack of Neighborhood Bonding	Mobility Rate Neighborhood Watch Groups Neighborhood Associations
	Severe Economic Deprivation	Low Socioeconomic Status Boarded-up Dwellings Lack of Employment Opportunities	Free/Reduced Lunch Data Presence of Low Income Housing Unemployment Rate

### *Protective Factor Indicators*

While it is essential to understand that risk factors in multiple areas of a child's living and learning environment shape his or her experience, the most promising approaches to enhancing resiliency are those that foster the development of protective factors (Benard, 1991). A child exposed to various protective factors is likely to develop resiliency despite exposure to numerous risks. To assist school staff in assessing the presence or absence of conditions which promote the healthy development of students, we have included the following measures of protective factors within the school.

#### **Caring and Support**

Nurturing faculty and staff  
Personal attention and interest from teachers  
Positive adult role models  
Peer support and cooperation  
Creative, supportive school leadership  
Warm, responsive climate

#### **High Expectations**

Success is expected of all students and staff  
Minimum mastery of basic skills by all students is established  
Support is provided for all students to achieve success  
Emphasis on high order academics  
Alternative resources and activities are available  
Absence of negative labeling and tracking

#### **Opportunities for Meaningful Participation**

Students are given responsibility and decision-making roles in the school  
Students take part in meaningful activities  
The contributions of students are valued  
Participation in extracurricular activities is encouraged  
Parents and community participate in instruction and activities  
Culturally diverse curricula are utilized



## **Section 5: Strategies that Help Diminish Risk and/or Promote Protective Factors**

School staff can work to ameliorate risk and promote/create protective factors in the following ways:

- Teach the children how to be optimistic
- Ensure that children feel competent in something
- Give children opportunities to “influence” others
- Practice problem-solving strategies in real-life situations
- Encourage students to read to their parents rather than the other way around (Rutter found that this increased reading scores)
- Encourage classroom teachers, rather than guidance counselors, to provide support to students for ordinary problems (promotes bonding)
- Use the language of high expectancy: “I know you can do it, and I’m here to help you.”
- Model empathy, caring, helpfulness
- Walk the talk (model what you want to see from students)
- Teach social skills in ways that promote learning the skill
  - ⇒ tell children why they are learning the skill
  - ⇒ tell them what the skill is (name it)
  - ⇒ tell them how the skill will be practiced
  - ⇒ give them feedback on their use of the skill and how they can get better at using the skill
  - ⇒ call the skill by name so that you can prompt them to use it as situations arise until it becomes habit
- Ask students how they would do something differently if one of their actions produces a negative outcome
- Allow students to work with you to set some classroom and school rules
- Allow students to be responsible for their materials
- Provide regular feedback on academics and behavior
- Encourage persistence
- Offer opportunities to participate in cross-age tutoring
- Listen to children
- Teach children how to be friends
- Work with others to assist children in getting needed services
- Organize children in as many situations as possible that build “community”

The list below includes some well-known *specific strategies or activities* to ameliorate risk and/or promote or create protective factors to foster resiliency. There may be others not included here, which are equally effective.

Service Learning  
Head Start  
Structured After-School or Out-of-School Programs  
Social Responsibility  
Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Programs  
Conflict Resolution  
Peer Mediation  
Cooperative Learning  
Intergenerational Mentoring  
Adult Mentoring  
Peer Mentoring  
Integrated Services Model  
Organized Youth Groups (*e.g.*, Scouting, 4-H, YMCA/YWCA, and Boys/Girls Clubs)

*Questions to ask before selecting strategies to reduce risk and/or create/promote protective factors:*

- **Will this strategy address our prioritized needs based on our assessments?**
- **What Risk Factor(s) will this strategy ameliorate?**
- **What Protective Factor will this strategy create or promote (based on Benard’s “Three Protective Factors,” Rutter’s “Four Protective Processes,” or Hawkins’ “Social Development Theory” with its four protective factors)?**
- **Is this strategy going to be used long enough to coax, enhance, or foster resiliency attributes?**

Once you have selected a strategy, complete the “**Strategy Assessment Form.**”

Other forms available here for your use:

- **Action Plan Steps**
- **Monitoring Change In Practice**
- **Do I See Resiliency Attributes?**







