



## Preventing Dating Violence by Implementing School-Based Education Laws

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According to the National Survey on Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence, more than 60 percent of teens in the United States said they had experienced some kind of abuse — physical, sexual and/or emotional — by someone they were currently or had previously dated. In addition to experiencing negative mental health, social, and academic consequences, young people experiencing dating violence are at higher risk of being involved in abusive relationships as adults. While dating violence is sometimes brushed off as casual drama or “teens being teens”, dating violence **can turn deadly, particularly for girls**. And though violence between partners is often hidden or occurs in private, it permeates culture, sets norms, and erodes families and communities.

### Dating Violence Prevention in Schools

Youth spend most of their time outside the home at school, making schools an ideal setting for preventing dating violence. Their diverse student populations, regular contact with adolescents, and central role in peer relationships position schools as key sites for early prevention efforts. When schools foster connectedness and raise awareness about dating violence, they can create a climate that encourages care seeking, increases support for affected students, and promotes social norms intolerant of violence.

Recognizing the seriousness of dating violence and schools as important venues for prevention, **many states have passed laws** mandating or encouraging **education about teen dating violence in K-12 schools**. In many cases, these laws were passed due to the advocacy of families and communities after the murder of a young person by a partner. In Alaska, the law is known as **Bree’s Law**. In 2021, “**Bree’s Bill**” was introduced to the U.S. Senate to develop education programs to prevent teen dating violence in middle and high schools nationwide, but it has not yet been passed.

Passing laws and having written policies are important ways to recognize that schools play a critical role in addressing dating violence among students. While there is considerable variability in dating violence laws across states, two common features are requirements for school districts to provide educational prevention programs for students and/or staff, and to have written policies for dating violence. These written policies can include information about disciplinary consequences and designated staff responsible for coordinating efforts. There is a wide range of specificity in the existing state laws and schools and districts often have substantial latitude in what to teach. For example, **laws in only one-third of states** noted that prevention education had to be evidence-based. Implementation of the laws and policies varies greatly by district and in individual schools.

### Inconsistent Implementation of Dating Violence Laws in Schools

In a recent study on implementing teen dating violence laws and policies in high schools, we found that implementation is often lacking, with inconsistencies in if and how schools address dating violence. This is the case even in states with strong laws and districts with written policies about dating violence. High school students and staff we spoke to in four states with long-standing and relatively comprehensive laws had little awareness of these laws and policies and often said very little education was actually taking place in their school.

Importantly, students want education on dating violence and healthy relationships. One high school student told us: "I would like to learn the good and the bad in relationships. Not just the good part or not just the bad part. I would like to learn how people go along, or how people stay together for so long going through the hard times and the bad times. I just wanna learn about the main parts of a relationship."

## Recommendations to Support Implementation of Dating Violence Laws in Schools

To make sure that laws that have passed are actually put into practice, state entities, such as Departments of Education, can support districts and schools in the following ways:

- **Provide guidance or technical assistance to make the laws more concrete.** Because the language of the laws is often broad, state Departments of Education can provide a list of specific programs and curricula that align with their state's requirements for providing prevention education for students. They could also craft model policy language for districts to adopt and adapt.
- **Devote funding and resources to implementing mandates.** Strong evidence-based programs and curricula often cost money for schools to purchase. In addition, funding could support staff time to ensure there are designated individuals to respond to incidents of dating violence and coordinate educational efforts. Given that state laws and education requirements are ever evolving, districts need resources to keep their policies and programs up to date.
- **Provide oversight to ensure schools are carrying out the requirements.** Schools could report back annually about their policies and programs to their state Department of Education. Some states tie specific funding or accreditation to compliance to incentivize schools to meet the requirements.

We mandate that students learn about a wide variety of topics in school including math, writing, and science, yet all of us are in relationships with others throughout our lives. We all need to learn how to build healthy, safe, and trusting relationships. What more essential skill is there? State entities, such as Departments of Education, can support students in doing just that by helping schools to fully implement dating violence education laws.

Read more in Avanti Adhia et al., "**Implementation of Teen Dating Violence Laws and Policies in High Schools: Staff and Student Perceptions.**" *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2025).