

## Building Capacity in Military-Connected Schools

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### **Limited Time Offer**

For a short time, Teachers College Press is offering free copies of Building Capacity's guidebooks for educators and military parents. Click [here](#) to request a copy. These books are essential resources for those who work with military-connected students.

### **Support Available to Help Districts Deal with Teen Substance Use and Suicide**

#### ***School-Based Prevention Programs Serving as a Potential Model for the State***

Since the beginning of the *Building Capacity* Consortium, the partnering school districts and USC have worked together to identify resources and programs that can help schools across California and the nation address serious mental health issues facing some students. These include issues such as substance use and suicide ideation.

The California Healthy Kids Survey shows, for example, that 18 percent of all 9th graders and 23 percent of all 11th graders in California say they recently used drugs or alcohol. And among secondary students, 19 percent of 9th graders and 17 percent of 11th graders throughout California say they have seriously considered attempting suicide.

This means that the vast majority of students in California do not deal with these issues on a regular basis. The majority of youth are resilient, thriving, and receive support from their family, friends, social networks and schools. However, these percentages also mean that a large number of students could use more support and guidance to overcome these mental health problems. More intense and specialized services are needed to help this group of students and their families.

"This is a statewide and even national problem. A meaningful proportion of students and families nationwide are dealing with these serious issues," says Dr. Ron Astor, professor at the USC School of Social Work and Rossier School of Education "We know it's hard to get kids to succeed academically in school if they are dealing with depression, suicidal ideation and substance use issues."

Several key organizations within San Diego County are available to help educators better understand

## Quick Links...

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these problems and to help students struggling with these types of issues.

### **Suicide Prevention Council Offers Training**

The Suicide Prevention Council (SPC) is a community-wide effort to reduce and eliminate suicides in San Diego County.

The Council's Question, Persuade, Refer training teaches "gatekeepers"--including educators, parents and community members--to recognize a crisis and to identify the warning signs that someone might be thinking about suicide.

In partnership with the San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) and OptumHealth, SPC provided this training to over 700 people last year.

SPC is also a member of the San Diego Military Family Collaborative, where Diana Pineda, Building Capacity's project manager, heard a recent presentation on the SPC's work.

"This is a great opportunity to partner with them and bring them into the schools," Pineda said.

For more information, visit this [link](#) or contact Yeni Palomino at [ypalomino@sdchip.org](mailto:ypalomino@sdchip.org).

### **Confronting Substance Abuse**

Another model that districts might want to consider replicating is READI, which stands for Recovery Education Alcohol/Drug Instruction. READI is being implemented in the San Dieguito Union High School District.

Students are referred to READI if they are found in possession of alcohol or drugs, alcohol or drug paraphernalia or are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Completing the program allows students to avoid a suspension on their record.

Parents and students can also request to attend the program.

READI, an intensive, two-day course for students held at La Costa Canyon High School, is currently the only program being promoted by the San Diego HHSA.

Parents participate in the program by attending a mandatory support group.

Students are also required to perform 10 hours of community service, have five

hours of recovery support, complete the READI Relapse Prevention Booklet, attend six weeks of a post-READI group and provide drug test results.

For more information, visit the READI [website](#).

### **Partnerships Are Important**

While many districts have counselors and social workers, it's important, Astor says, to also have university and community partners, such as the SPC, because they can help build awareness about community resources among teachers, staff and parent groups.

Faculty members at USC's San Diego Academic Center are also available to work with schools and districts in these areas. Dr. Jennifer Lewis, an adjunct lecturer who also provides workshops and in-service training to school districts, and Dr. Terence Fitzgerald, a clinical assistant professor with school social work experience, have expressed interest in working with schools and districts wanting to expand services and awareness in these critical areas.

### **Q&A with Dr. Kris De Pedro**

This month we feature a special interview with Dr. Kris De Pedro who helped write the grant proposal for the *Building Capacity Consortium*. Kris earned his Ph.D. last year from USC and has been an important member of the research team.

Kris is now an assistant professor in the College of Educational Studies at Chapman University. We asked him to talk about his research on



school climate. Click [here](#) for the interview.

### **Spotlight On: Jodi McClay and Diana Damon White**

This month we feature two educators in the Temecula Valley Unified School District (TVUSD) who have worked closely with *Building Capacity* since the beginning of the grant--Jodi McClay, the assistant superintendent of educational support services, and Diana Damon White, the director of special programs.

In her 22 years in education, McClay has also been

a teacher, an assistant principal, a principal and the director of curriculum, instruction and assessment. She is also an author and has provided training to thousands of teachers across the country.



**McClay (L) and Damon-White**

In 2010, she was selected as Riverside County Administrator of the Year. Nominators said she "has a tremendous impact on the culture, achievement, and instruction"

within the TVUSD and that "her strategic, unending focus on continuously improving classroom instruction is her forte and passion."

The district, McClay says is "blessed" to be a part of the Consortium and to have USC MSW students in the schools.

"These student professionals/interns provide valuable services to our at-risk students and have become instrumental in meeting the diverse social needs of our children," she says.

With all 26 years of her career in TVUSD, Damon White began as an English and social studies teacher and also worked with gifted and talented students and the Safe and Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Free schools program. Before her current position, she also coordinated categorical programs.

Damon White works with the Assistance League and is on the board of Temecula Valley Foundation for Excellence in Education, an organization that supports schools and raises money for educational grants to teachers.

Being part of the Consortium has allowed the district to continue giving the California Healthy Kids Survey and to gather information on military students in the district, Damon White says.

"The information gained fueled a grass-roots movement called Because Nice Matters that spread from one high school to the entire district and to the community," Damon White says, adding that the program "addresses the issue of bullying and empowering kids and adults to take a stand against it."

## Featured Resource: The Future of Children Issue on Military Children and Families

The Future  
of Children  
PRINCETON-BROOKINGS



The challenges faced by military children are the focus of The Future of Children's fall journal. The publication features 11 articles on issues such as resilience,

demographics, early childhood development and building "communities of care" for military children and families.

The full journal, an executive summary and a policy brief are available at this [link](#).

The Future of Children is a collaboration between Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and the Brookings Institution.

### Headlines and Resources

We regularly feature stories, reports and resources related to military children on our [website](#). Check back often for new additions, such as these:

- The [Highland Park News](#) featured a military family that created an after-school club to help military children build resilience and feel connected to their communities.
- Operation Homefront is currently accepting nominations for Military Child of the Year. Nominations will be accepted through Dec. 14, and one child from each branch will be honored with the award in April during Month of the Military Child. Click this [link](#) for more information.
- Click [here](#) for the September/October issue of the Academic Anchor, the newsletter of the Navy Region Southwest's school liaison officers. Click on the Academic Anchor tab.

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