

October 2011

Schools and Students Receive Safety Training

Over 140 people attended *Building Capacity's* first regional workshop earlier this month to hear the latest research on school safety, bullying and psychological "first aid" from presenters Dr. Ron Astor, principal investigator on the project, and Dr. Marleen Wong, a co-principal investigator.

Held at Oceanside High School, the half-day event was designed for staff from our consortium schools as well as the MSW interns from both USC and San Diego State University who are working in the schools this year.

Teams from the schools were able to examine school safety data from their own schools based on this year's California Health Kids Survey, which led to small discussions among team members on how to address the issues raised by the survey.

"As a counselor on a data-driven grant, I often look at this data, but analyzing it with the staff was a reality check and nice opportunity to dialogue," says Nicole Pablo, a counselor in the Oceanside district.

Randel Gibson, who directs student services and special education for the Oceanside district, said the "in-depth research data presented gave site teams a more comprehensive understanding of risk factors."

Carolina Miranda, a USC MSW student working this year at San Onofre School, said the workshop provided her with "very useful information."

"As a future clinician working in the school setting, I found the information, statistics and more importantly the voices of the children to be impactful," she said. "Bullying is just a symptom of a bigger issue. A child who doesn't pay attention in class is not just a lazy child. It is important to understand the complexity of the current issues occurring in our nation's classrooms in order to better assist our kids in need."

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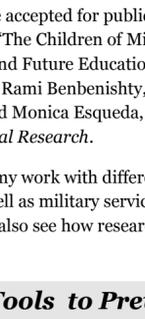
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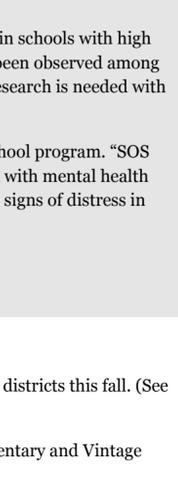
Dr. Marleen Wong, co-principal investigator for *Building Capacity*, recently participated in a speaker series on Sept. 11 sponsored by the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#), as part of its continuing education program. Visit the NCTSN's Learning Center website for instructions on how to access previous webinar materials. Creating a [free](#) account is required. Her topic, "A Decade of Growth: Reflections of What We Have Learned Since 9/11," is part of the Terrorism and Disaster Series.

Spotlight On: Kris De Pedro

Kris De Pedro is a Ph.D. student in the USC Rossier School of Education and one of the earliest members of the *Building Capacity* team. In addition to military-connected schools, Kris' research interests also include school discipline policies, school climate, and high-achieving minority students.

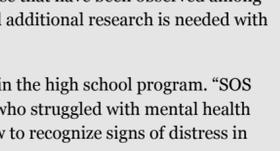
Kris is also the lead author of the first literature review on the education of military children to be accepted for publication by a major education research journal. "The Children of Military Service Members: Challenges, Resources and Future Educational Research" with co-authors Dr. Ron Astor, Dr. Rami Benbenishty, Dr. Joey Nuñez Estrada, Gabrielle Smith and Monica Esqueda, will soon appear in the *Review of Educational Research*.

"I love the team environment and my work with different groups of people—researchers, social workers and educators, as well as military service personnel," Kris says about being part of the project. "It's exciting to also see how research is translated into practice on such a grand scale."



Featured Resource: Tools to Prevent Youth Suicide

[SOS Signs of Suicide](#) is a prevention program designed specifically for middle and high school students from Screening for Mental Health, a nonprofit organization based in Wellesley Hills, Mass. The program teaches students how to identify depression and other symptoms within themselves or their friends that could lead to suicide or suicide attempts. The program uses the ACT® technique, which stands for Acknowledge, Care and Tell.



Participants learn to acknowledge the signs of suicide and take them seriously, show that they care for the person they are concerned about, and then tell a responsible adult.

The high school program is the only school-based suicide prevention program that has been listed on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's registry of evidence-based programs and practices that address suicide risk and depression. A 2007 randomized control study showed that the SOS program led to a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40 percent.

Additional research has been conducted on the effects of the program in schools with high numbers of military children. Results were similar to those that have been observed among non-military students. But the sample size was small and additional research is needed with this population.

New materials in the program include a DVD to be used in the high school program. "SOS Friends for Life" features true stories of three teenagers who struggled with mental health issues. It also provides students with instructions for how to recognize signs of distress in themselves or a friend and how to respond effectively.

Click here to watch a [video](#) on the program.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The **Family Readiness Express** is scheduled for visits in two more districts this fall. (See our [August issue](#) for information on this remarkable vehicle.)

Oct. 24-28: Temecula Valley Unified School District, La Vorgna Elementary and Vintage Hills Elementary

Dec. 1-2: Chula Vista Elementary School District (specific locations to be announced)

Free training opportunities for MSWs and school district personnel continue throughout the fall. (Check the [August issue](#) for more detailed information on these workshops.)

School Safety:

Oct. 24: Temecula Valley School District Conference Center

Nov. 7: San Diego Academic Center, Rancho Bernardo

Violence Threat Risk Assessment:

Nov. 4: Temecula Valley School District Conference Center

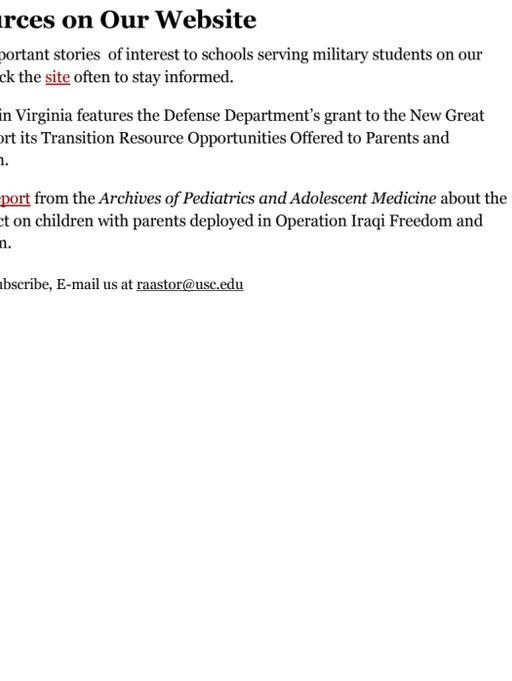
Dec. 5: San Diego Academic Center in Rancho Bernardo

Dec. 6: Oceanside High School

To RSVP, email raastor@usc.edu. For questions, email Diana Pineda at dianapin@usc.edu.

Temecula District Hosts 'Boots on the Ground' Fun Run

The Temecula Valley Unified School District recently partnered with Welcome Home Troops, a Lake Elsinore, Calif.-based organization to host a "Boots on the Ground" fun run for returning veterans. Diana Damon White, the director of special programs for the district, said officials hope to make it an annual event.



What the Interstate Compact Says About: Graduation

When military students reach high school, it becomes critical that they receive credit for the courses they take so that they can graduate on time. The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children provides guidance to public schools regarding making sure high school students are not put at a disadvantage if they change schools during these years.



The Compact states that local education agencies should waive specific courses required for graduation if the student has completed similar coursework in another school. If the school or district decides not to grant a waiver, it should provide the student with alternative coursework that satisfies the requirement in order to allow the student to graduate on time.

Regarding tests, the Compact states that schools should accept any exit or end-of-course exams required for graduation from the sending state as well as any national norm-referenced achievement tests. The receiving school should also accept any alternative assessments that were taken in the sending state.

If a student moves during his or her senior year and is deemed by the receiving state to be ineligible to graduate for some reason, that state should take all steps to ensure that the student receives a diploma from the sending school, as long as all graduation requirements in that state are met.

For more information on specific topics addressed by the Compact, visit the [Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission](#).

News and Resources on Our Website

We have featured several important stories of interest to schools serving military students on our website in recent weeks. Check the [site](#) often to stay informed.

This [story](#) from KFBB News in Virginia features the Defense Department's grant to the New Great Falls School District to support its Transition Resource Opportunities Offered to Parents and Students (TROOPS) program.

Also of interest is this [new report](#) from the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* about the possible mental health impact on children with parents deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Questions, comments or to unsubscribe, E-mail us at raastor@usc.edu