

**COMMUNITY MATTERS**  
presents the

**SAFER SCHOOLS SYMPOSIUM and YOUTH FORUM:**

**COLLABORATING within COUNTIES and/or DISTRICTS to  
REDUCE SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE  
by EMPOWERING YOUTH**

**Need:** Because of continuing interpersonal tensions among various groups, bullying, peer mistreatment, and ongoing threats to school safety, and because schools are committed to easing these tensions and creating and maintaining safer schools and communities, districts and counties/regions are seeking solutions to reduce school violence and improve school climate. Conducting one or more **Safer Schools Symposia** will significantly advance efforts to engage and empower students in the process of creating and maintaining a positive social-emotional climate in local schools. The **Symposium** brings a broad cross-section of key community, district/county/regional, and school-site leaders together with experts in the fields of school safety, violence prevention, and youth empowerment for a day or more of education, dialogue, and planning.

**Purposes:** The **Safer Schools Symposium** increases awareness throughout the district/region/county of the broader role students can play in creating safer schools. It can also deepen the commitment of school and community leaders to change policy and practice, and take concrete steps to reach out to involve more students in these efforts. The **Safer Schools Symposium** leads to more students being involved in a variety of ways as agents of positive social change, and thereby reduce incidents of mistreatment and violence, and improve school climate.

- ✚ IMPROVING SCHOOL SAFETY: Developing strategies and planning for complementing and strengthening existing efforts in order to show progress on the outcomes related to improving school safety and school climate, and reducing violence.
- ✚ INCREASING COLLABORATION AMONG SCHOOLS, YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS, LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Collaborative activities held to inform, inspire, and share with one another the practices, strategies, and programs that are already in place, what works and what hasn't.
- ✚ SYNCHRONIZING EFFORTS: Many districts and counties are faced with fragmentation of school safety efforts: varied and multiple programs, site-based approaches, and not enough strategizing and communicating among the school sites within the district or county.
- ✚ FOCUSING ON YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: Narrow the focus and go deeper than usual into an exploration of the roles students can play in reducing violence and improving school climate. While all 5 determinants of school climate are important, the Symposium focuses on this most underutilized, readily available and cost-effective resource: YOUTH.
- ✚ STRATEGIC PLANNING: Collaborate, learn, share, plan, strategize, change. Create an Action Plan.

**Format:** A Safer Schools Symposium is a one-day conference-type gathering that brings content experts together with school leaders and community stakeholders. This Symposium focuses on effective strategies for engaging students in increasing school safety and improving school climate. It is designed to raise awareness and increase knowledge, showcase current best-practices within the district/county/region, foster collaboration, and produce action plans. The one-day structured format includes presentations from those who can show best-practices already utilized within the schools, expert speakers, and youth themselves; it ends with strategic planning in district and site-based groups.

- Attendees include all higher-level decision-makers from the school district(s) as well as from county and/or regional offices of education and each school site: superintendents, directors, site administrators, coordinators, program advisors, grant managers and budget planners, counselors and counseling directors. It also includes city officials (mayors, city council members, directors of youth-focused departments), leaders from law-enforcement (police chiefs, sheriffs, SROs and police specializing in youth crimes and issues), juvenile justice (staff and judges), gang task forces, mental health and guidance, youth-oriented community-based organizations and others involved in working to make schools and communities safer and more welcoming for all.
- Start the day with inspiring speakers on best practices in youth development and school safety. This could include a keynote presentation by Rick Phillips, an experienced educator, facilitator, strategic planner and co-author of *Safe School Ambassadors: Harnessing Student Power to Stop Bullying and Violence*.
- Youth and local adults from other sectors may also give presentations, including teams from chosen schools who will demonstrate or discuss their successful violence-prevention approaches and programs already in place.
- School teams (or district teams at a county or regional symposium) will be given a *SCHOOL SAFETY SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL* to complete prior to the Symposium. They will utilize their responses to this tool for planning and strategizing together in the afternoon, facilitated by activities and questions provided by CM staff.
- Teams will leave the Symposium with specific plans and concrete next steps for reducing school violence and improving school climate at every site.

### **Youth Forum**

The Safer Schools Symposium is often preceded by a Youth Forum on Violence Prevention, also facilitated by CM staff. The Youth Forum is an effective way to accomplish two important objectives:

- allow local youth to explore the issues surrounding school violence and mistreatment – to express their views, report on their experiences, learn from each other, see their commonalities, and build a stronger network of relationships between and among the many subgroups within the host district or county.
- organize the voice of youth for inclusion in the Symposium – to educate adults about youth issues and include their energies in planning and decision-making

Participants include the socially influential leaders of the diverse student groups and cliques at the high and/or middle schools within the host district or county.

**What does the planning for a SAFER SCHOOLS SYMPOSIUM include:  
Who does what, when?**

- Contact Community Matters for clarification, exploration, questions, planning.
- Take any ideas and potential plans to an existing or ad hoc planning team of leaders and thinkers in the district/county.
- Meet regularly over a 4 – 6 month period and consult with CM to prepare for and plan this event.
- Secure funding to help support this event.

**Community Matters will provide:** guidance and consultation to a team of district/county/regional staff (and others, if invited) responsible for planning the Symposium. CM facilitates the Symposium and conducts informational sessions in keynote/large-group and/or workshop/small-group settings. This includes:

- assistance with planning, including
  - ❖ the *SCHOOL SAFETY SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL*,
  - ❖ a timeline
  - ❖ a checklist
  - ❖ sample agendae/templates for events;
- suggestions for teams to present best-practices that highlight the roles students play in local school safety efforts;
- the keynote speaker (Rick Phillips or other expert);
- suggestions for other speakers;
- the event facilitator (CM);
- follow-up support.

**The district/region/county staff would be responsible for:** gathering participants, as well as providing facilities and logistics (e.g., supplies, printing, food).

**COSTS** vary with the length of the Symposium, whether the Youth Forum is included, etc. Please call for details.

<b>Safer Schools Symposium</b> (one day) and <b>Youth Forum</b> (one day), plus summary report	
Planning and Facilitation: \$2500/event, 2 events	\$5000
Expenses: estimated for one facilitator making 2 trips of 1 day each @ \$500/day	\$1000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$6000</b>

**CONTACT:**

Rick Phillips, MS Ed., Executive Director, [rick@community-matters.org](mailto:rick@community-matters.org), (707) 823-6159 x101

Sally Ember, Ed.D., Outreach Coordinator, [sallyember@community-matters.org](mailto:sallyember@community-matters.org) (707) 823-6159 x102