

# Lead Peace

## Outcomes of a Collaborative Service Learning Program for Urban Middle School Youth



- R. Sieving, University of Minnesota
- B. Morris, University of Minnesota
- A. Ericson, University of Minnesota
- E. Irwin, Nia Imani Youth Center, Kwanzaa Church

B. Knaus, Cityview School

P. Russ, Hennepin County Village Social Services

D. Stone, University of Minnesota

H. Walls, Minneapolis Public School District



## Background & Purpose

Youth violence & school failure have a devastating impact on young people, their families, their communities and society. Young people of color and low-income communities are disproportionately affected.

### Prior research links service learning with better school performance and less violence

- Focus on building youths' connections and contributions through meaningful activities that serve their schools and communities

### Goals of the Lead Peace demonstration study

- Develop and implement a middle school service learning program to reduce risks for violence and school failure
- Evaluate impact of program on student outcomes

### Purpose of this study

- Examine 8th grade student outcomes associated with involvement in Lead Peace



DEPARTMENT OF PEDIATRICS  
DIVISION OF ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND MEDICINE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

## Lead Peace Program

### Context

Lead Peace programming takes place in the most socially and economically challenged Minneapolis neighborhoods.

- Half of homicides citywide happened within 6 miles of Lead Peace partner schools.
- 91-95% of students in Lead Peace partner schools receive free or reduced lunch.
- In 2009, only 16-30% of students in these schools passed state math exams.



### Partners

UMN Prevention Research Center  
Minneapolis Public School District (MPS)  
MPS K-8 Schools: Cityview, Hmong Academy, Lucy Laney & Nellie Stone Johnson Schools

Hennepin County Village Social Services  
Community Partners: Kwanzaa Church's Nia-Imani Youth Center, Beacons & ACES Afterschool Programs

### Classroom service learning programming

- Utilized MPS service learning curriculum
- 40-45 sessions per year in 7th & 8th grades
- Focus on leadership, social & emotional skills

### Small group format

- Allowed for development of supportive relationships with peers & adults
- Facilitated by team of youth-serving professionals from school & community

### Youth-driven process

- Small groups identified social issues, developed, implemented and reflected on service projects.

### Service learning projects

#### Mary Jo Copeland Compassion Project

Students selected the founder of *Sharing & Caring Hands* and *Mary's Place Shelter* as their hero of compassion. They researched her life and work, visited the shelter and worked with the younger children there.



#### SuperAdolfo

Students studied 1980 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Adolfo Esquivel and created a storybook about him to read with third grade students.



## Evaluation

- Design: quasi-experimental study
- Two intervention schools offered Lead Peace programming in 7-8th grades
- One control school (no programming)

### Data sources

- Student surveys, end of school year in 2008 & 2009
- Student, staff, & school principal interviews



### Outcome measures

- School connectedness (10 items,  $\alpha=0.82$ , range 0-3)
- Peer connectedness (7 items,  $\alpha=0.92$ , range 0-3)
- Cooperative behavior (11 items,  $\alpha=0.76$ , range 0-11)
- Interpersonal skills (5 items,  $\alpha=0.55$ , range 0-3)
- Violence involvement (4 items,  $\alpha=0.78$ , range 0-3)
- Bullying perpetration (12 items,  $\alpha=0.89$ , range 0-11)

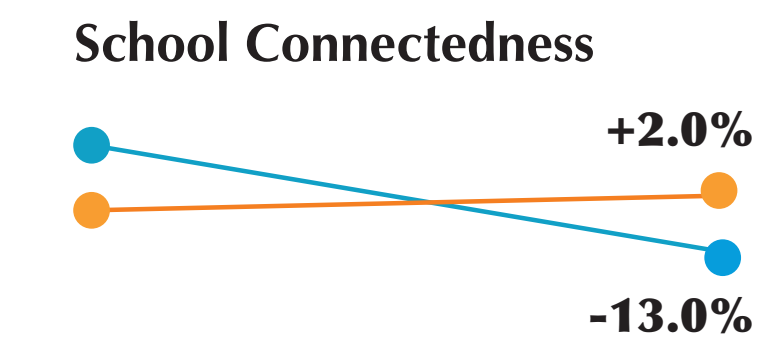
### Study Sample Descriptives 7th Graders Surveyed in 2008

	Total Mean or % n = 130	Intervention Schools Mean or % n = 91	Control School Mean or % n = 39
<b>Race**</b>			
Asian	10%	13%	3%
Black	65%	55%	87%
Hispanic	15%	21%	0%
Mixed/other	11%	11%	10%
<b>Average age (sd)</b>	12.96 (0.58)	12.97 (0.59)	12.96 (0.54)
<b>% Male</b>	51%	52%	49%
<b>Number of schools attended during school year</b>			
1 school	77%	73%	82%
2 or more schools	13%	27%	18%
<b>Years lived in neighborhood</b>			
< 1 year	30%	32%	24%
1-3 years	27%	24%	34%
> 3 years	43%	43%	42%
<b>% Suspended during school year</b>	48%	47%	51%
<b># School days unexcused absence (sd)</b>	4.16 (4.94)	3.74 (4.29)	5.08 (6.09)
<b>Average GPA, 4 pt. scale (sd)</b>	2.45 (1.02)	2.45 (1.03)	2.44 (0.98)

Key: \* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01

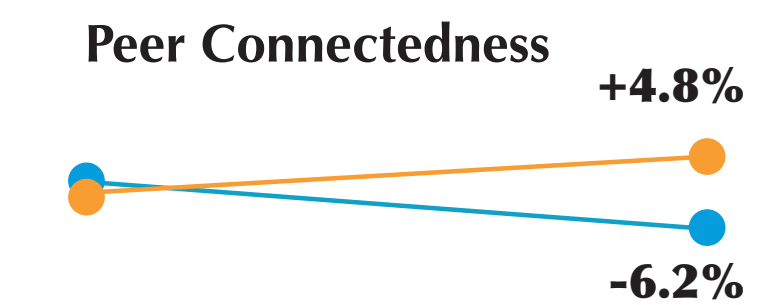
## Findings

### Lead Peace Students are More Connected

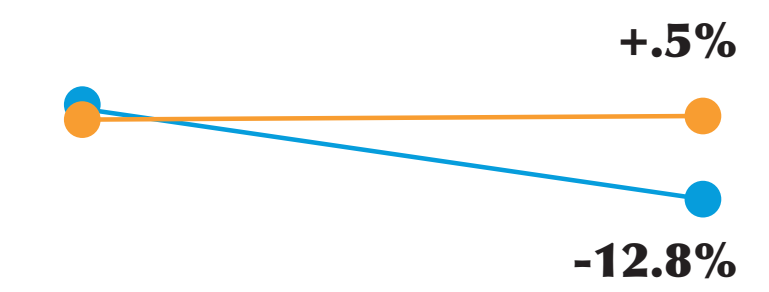


Key:  
Control School  
Lead Peace Schools

"We're supposed to be the leaders of the school and Lead Peace teaches us how to be leaders and show the little kids how they're supposed to be."

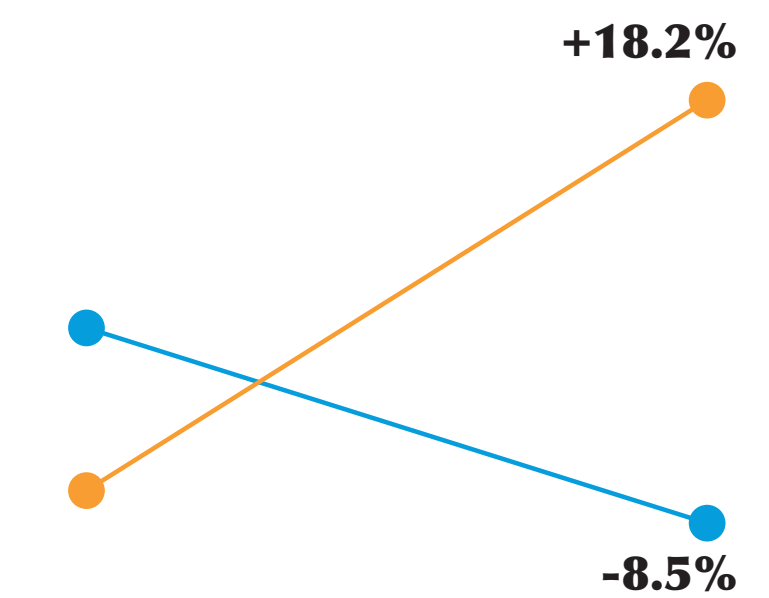


### Lead Peace Students have Greater Interpersonal Skills



"Lead Peace teaches you how to be a leader in the community. Like if you see a little kid that needs help, you help him up. And it's teaching kids about compassion. Compassion is to show concern to others and yourself."

### Lead Peace Students report More Cooperative Behaviors



"Sometimes me and my friends will be talking about the things [we're doing in Lead Peace] and we contribute to the next person's project [even though] they're in a different group, just helping make something better."

While self-reported **bullying behaviors & violence involvement** dropped from 7th to 8th grades, similar declines were noted for intervention and control schools.

"I think [other students] should do Lead Peace... Instead of gang violence you can just try to help the neighborhood and show the kids around you [not to] jump in gangs."

## Analytic Approach

Mixed-model regressions tested for cross-sectional intervention effects from 7th to 8th grade, controlling for race, gender.

## Conclusion

Lead Peace service learning program is effective in building skills and supports that protect young adolescents from violence involvement and school failure.

**contact:**

**Renee E. Sieving, Ph.D., RN**

Associate Professor, School of Nursing

Deputy Director, Healthy Youth Development • Prevention Research Center

email: sievi001@umn.edu

telephone: 612.626.4527

**Barbara J. McMorris, Ph.D.**

Senior Research Associate, School of Nursing

Healthy Youth Development • Prevention Research Center

email: mcmo0023@umn.edu

telephone: 612.624.9909



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