



[Back to School: September is National Campus Safety and Awareness Month](#)

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It's the time for students to head back to school. We are often reluctant to acknowledge and talk about risks and safety at school – especially related to sexual assault and dating violence, but we must. One of President Obama's goals for educators nationwide is to "produce a higher percentage of college graduates than any other country in the world by the end of the next decade." At the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and the U.S. Department of Education, we know that students cannot learn if they don't feel safe. We need to attend to their basic security needs and place increased focus on primary prevention of violence and victimization in early adolescence – or even earlier.

Unfortunately for young people, sexual harassment and sexual violence are too common on many school campuses. There are victims of all ages, in areas all across the country.

The majority of sexual victimization starts early in life:

- Approximately 80 percent of female victims experienced their first rape before the age of 25 and almost half experienced the first rape before age 18 (30 percent between 11-17 years old and 12 percent at or before the age of 10).
- 28 percent of male victims of rape were first raped when they were 10 years old or younger.
- About 35 percent of women who were raped as minors were also raped as adults compared to 14 percent of women without an early rape history.

This data, extracted from the [National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#) conducted in 2010, highlights the crucial importance of preventing sexual violence before it occurs. Studies show that a significant amount of dating violence takes place on school grounds. Teachers have opportunities to observe interactions between dating partners that other adults, like parents, might not see. Educators play an important role in their school communities as they impart knowledge and serve as trusted role models for their students.

Title IX is the federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in educational institutions. Under Title IX, a school that receives federal funds may be held liable if it knows about and ignores sexual harassment or assault in its programs or activities. Schools can be held responsible in court whether the harassment or assault is committed by a faculty member, staff, or student. To assist educators with their sexual assault and harassment prevention efforts, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights issued a "[Dear Colleague Letter](#)" and guidance on sexual harassment which outlines a school's responsibilities under the law.

The enforcement of Title IX is a top priority of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. A recent example of the department's response to sexual assault allegations is the [proposed consent decree](#) filed by the Department of Justice and the Allentown, Pennsylvania School District addressing multiple complaints of sexual assault of students at Central Elementary School.

In July 2009, the department intervened in a lawsuit filed by several students against the district and conducted an extensive investigation. The department alleged that sexual assaults occurred on at least five occasions and that the district was made aware of each incident immediately after it occurred. The department also alleged that despite this notice, the district did not take appropriate action, and in some cases took no action, to prevent the

incidents from recurring. Further, the department alleged that the district had failed to adopt and implement sexual harassment policies and procedures as required by federal law which would have prevented the continued sexual assault of students. The Allentown School District has taken steps to address these issues and to provide a safe environment for students. Leaders from the district have called this a top priority. The Department of Justice and the district worked collaboratively to draft the consent decree to ensure the safety and well-being of all students in the district.

At OVW, we are committed to preventing these abuses and assaults on students. As much as we support the dedicated work of our partners in the Civil Rights Division, we believe these tragedies can be avoided before investigations and lawsuits become necessary. One way we plan to provide support and services for young people is through a new grant program: the [Consolidated Grant and Technical Assistance Program to Address Children and Youth Experiencing Domestic and Sexual Violence and Engage Men and Boys as Allies](#), or the Consolidated Youth Grant Program. This innovative program supports activities that were previously funded under four smaller OVW grant programs. Under that model, funding streams for prevention and intervention services, for programs targeting younger children, for programs targeting older youth, and for prevention efforts involving boys and men were separated.

The Consolidated Youth Grant Program creates a unique opportunity to provide support for both prevention and intervention services; for serving children, youth and young adults; and for mobilizing men and boys to work as allies with women and girls to prevent domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. The program supports comprehensive child- and youth-centered projects that maximize community-based efforts and evidence-informed practices. Projects supported under this program must address prevention, intervention, treatment and response. Applications for the FY 2012 Consolidated Youth Grant Program are due October 24, 2012.

This new Consolidated Youth Grant Program will compliment the historic work OVW has done on college campuses through our Campus Program which encourages a coordinated community approach that enhances victim safety and assistance, and supports efforts to hold offenders accountable. Sexual assault is widely considered to be the most underreported violent crime in America. Most sexual assaults on school campus are committed by an acquaintance of the victim, which explains, in part, why these crimes are so vastly underreported. At the Department of Justice and OVW, we commit to empower students through education and outreach to identify warning signs; work with school communities to ensure the safety and well being of the students in their care; ensure victims' and survivors' rights; and hold their perpetrators – and those that do not comply with federal laws – accountable.

As educators, administrators, and students head back to school, let us do so with fresh aspirations to create and support safe and healthy learning environments that are free from sexual harassment, assault and dating violence. We can do this through our example, by identifying behaviors that indicate risk or violation of Title IX, and by educating ourselves and our classrooms on what to do if we encounter incidence of sexual violence. Working together, we can help our students thrive and we can meet President Obama's goals for success.

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