



VIOLENCE PREVENTION AT THURGOOD MARSHALL ACADEMY PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Summary Brief
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This summary brief is based on research conducted by the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center on the violence prevention activities taking place at the Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter High School during the 2008–2009 school year. Researchers from the Justice Policy Center conducted an assessment of the school's violence prevention activities using qualitative and quantitative data from stakeholder interviews, programmatic records, and surveys with students and faculty. This brief provides an overview of Thurgood Marshall Academy's violence prevention approach. A more detailed report will follow in summer 2010.

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INTRODUCTION

Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter High School (TMA) is a nonprofit, college preparatory high school located in the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C. The school serves students in grades 9 through 12 with the explicit mission of preparing them to succeed in college and actively engage in a democratic society. Most TMA students reside in Wards 7 and 8, two of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in the District. The school is located in Ward 8, which has the highest rate of overall poverty (36 percent) and child poverty (47 percent) in D.C. According to the school's administrative records, 99 percent of students enrolled in TMA are Black and more than two-thirds qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

Yet, in contrast to other schools in the Ward 8 neighborhood and Washington, D.C., TMA boasts a 100 percent college acceptance rate among its graduating seniors. Further, recent scores from the D.C.'s Comprehensive Assessment System (DC CAS) tests showed that 67 and 72 percent of TMA students were proficient in reading and math in the 2009 school year, respectively. These proficiency scores are significantly higher than other D.C. high schools.¹ In fact, TMA is ranked first for math scores and second for reading scores among D.C. open enrollment high schools. In addition to one other school, TMA was one of D.C.'s more than 20 secondary schools nominated for the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Schools Program for vast improvement in student achievement, and it was the first D.C. school to move out of "school improvement status" under the No Child Left Behind Act. In addition to the U.S. Department of Education, the school has received honors from the U.S. News and World Report and the National Charter School Conference.

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Noteworthy features of TMA include a data-driven approach to academic achievement, a law-centric curriculum, extensive afterschool programs and community activities for students, and local partnerships with law firms, community organizations, and volunteers. In addition to creating a rigorous academic program, TMA administrators have focused their efforts on building and maintaining a safe learning environment for their students and faculty. In response to the prevalence of violence in the neighborhood where TMA is based and incidents of violence in other schools in the neighborhood, TMA has been focused on violence prevention since it opened in 2001.

The school has worked to include a variety of violence prevention activities to enhance the overall school environment, provide a safe space for learning, and distinguish the school environment from typical urban schools where metal detectors, routine bag searches, and a heavy police presence is the norm. These activities range from traditional violence prevention approaches, such as security guards, resource officers, and random searches, to non-traditional approaches, such as supervised morning greetings and afternoon dismissal, and a summer preparatory program for incoming freshmen and sophomores. Indeed, the violence prevention approach at TMA is broad, multipronged, and focused on the student environment. The stakeholders at TMA do not define their violence prevention approach as a “program” per se, but as a set of activities implemented to increase academic success and to reduce violence.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION AT THURGOOD MARSHALL ACADEMY

Based on information from interviews with school stakeholders, field observations, and programmatic records, **figure 1** describes the activities taking place at TMA in the 2008–2009 school year in a logic model. The activities that TMA identifies as part of their violence prevention model include both traditional and nontraditional violence prevention measures. To create a safe learning environment, TMA violence prevention activities include security cameras, security guards, and a police resource officer as well as

activities that create a distinct school culture through daily supervised morning check-in and afternoon dismissal, a staffing structure that encourages wraparound support to address student needs, and a robust extracurricular program. The school stakeholders identify school safety as an outcome of a high-achieving academic environment; therefore, each of the activities that the stakeholders identified as increasing academic achievement and a positive school culture has been included in the program logic model.

The co-founders of TMA opened the school under the philosophy that safety is an outcome of a high-achieving academic environment. The co-founders developed this philosophy after working at another disadvantaged school with metal detectors and mandatory bag searches, which one co-founder contends fostered a school environment where students felt academic achievement was secondary. According to this co-founder, “if students are more invested in school, they won’t sabotage it.... Students have no time to misbehave if they’re really into their education.” Therefore, while TMA has implemented a series of traditional violence prevention approaches, its view of violence prevention is broad, inclusive of activities that encourage and facilitate a high-achieving academic environment.

PROGRAM INPUTS

As shown in **figure 1**, TMA leverages resources among its faculty and staff as the primary inputs to its violence prevention model. Key staff in the violence prevention model include an academic director; deans; a parent coordinator; program staff, including a program director, coordinator, and volunteer associates; a school counselor; a school resource officer; security guards; a summer prep coordinator; and teachers. These nine positions are key resources in the school’s approach to violence prevention. **Table 1** lists the key functions of these program inputs as well as the mechanism (in bold) by which long-term outcomes are achieved. In addition to the staff investment, TMA has a physical security system that includes an alarm system and 25 cameras placed throughout the building.

Figure 1. Thurgood Marshall Academy Violence Prevention Approach

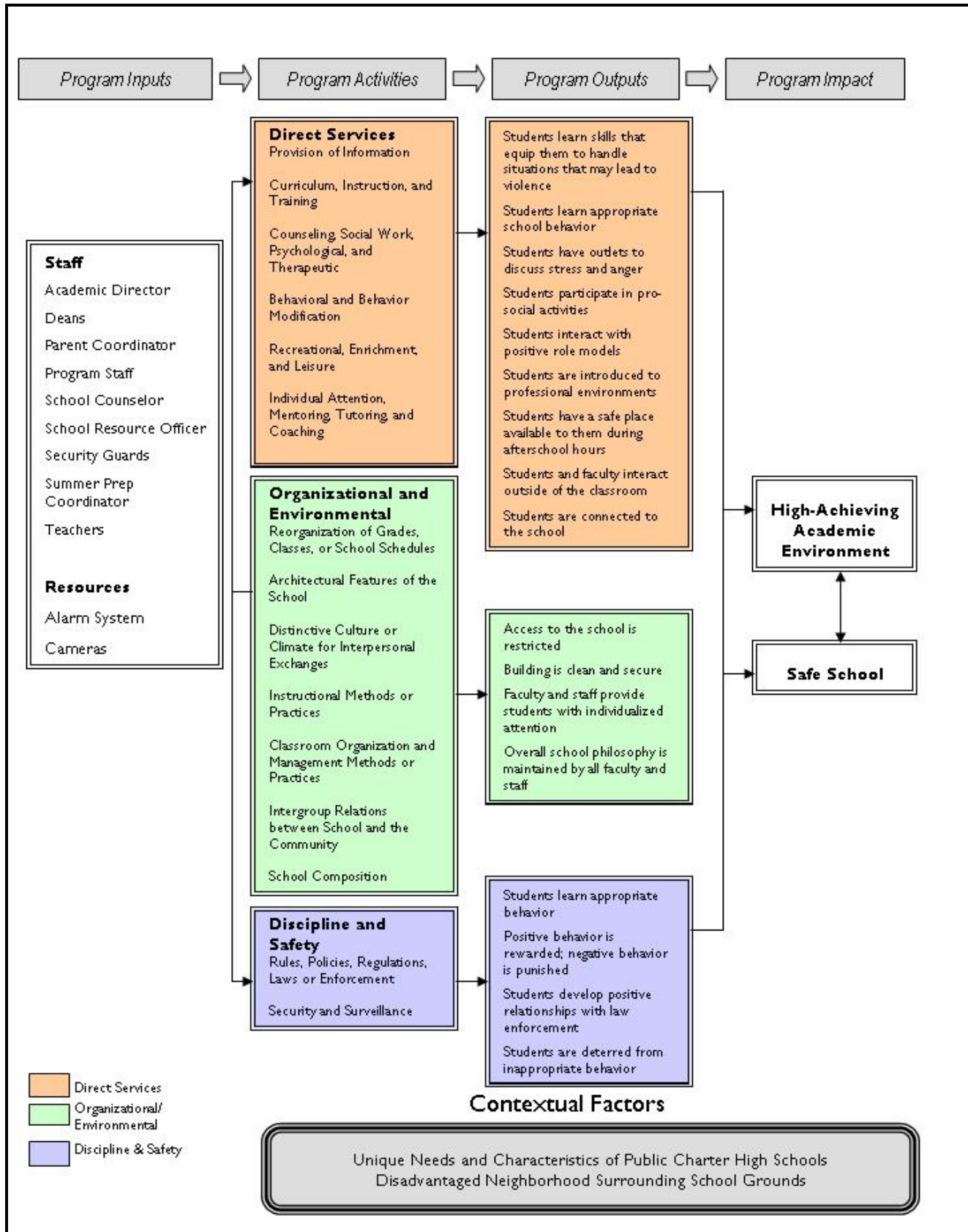


Table I. Key Staff Inputs to TMA Violence Prevention

Key Staff	Function
Academic Director	Oversight. There is one academic director employed at the school who oversees day-to-day school operations. The academic director also meets weekly with the deans on behavior contract cases, makes the final decision on all disciplinary hearings, welcomes the students at the beginning of each day (morning check-in), and dismisses students at the end of each day (afternoon dismissal).
Deans	Support/Culture. Three full-time deans support the teachers and students in an administrative capacity. Two deans serve one grade each, another dean serves two grades. The deans welcome the students during morning check-in, dismiss students at afternoon dismissal, and periodically check the nearby public transportation station. The deans are the primary facilitator of support or discipline for students—they administer the code of conduct, refer students to the school counselor as necessary, mediate situations between students and students and faculty formally and informally, and are the primary contact for family members. A small dean-to-student ratio allows for more individualized attention.
Parent Coordinator	Communication/Discipline. There is one parent coordinator who acts as a liaison to the parents/guardians of TMA students, notifying parents/guardians when a child is absent from school and clarifying questions parents/guardians may have about school announcements, notifications or student requirements. The parent coordinator also manages detention, supervising youth under detention and providing structured work activities for students while in detention.
Program Staff	Programming. The school has a robust extracurricular program, which includes mandatory and voluntary programs. These activities are spearheaded by a full-time program director, assistant director, and three volunteer program associates, of whom each lead one or more mandatory and voluntary extracurricular programs.
School Counselor	Counseling. The school has a full-time clinical counselor that sees students on a referred and walk-in basis. The counselor is also available to the parents of TMA students.
School Resource Officer	Security. A school resource officer from the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department is deployed at the school part-time. The officer responds to incidents occurring on campus and informs school staff (e.g., deans) when an incident takes place outside of school that involves a TMA student.
Security Guards	Security. One part-time and two full-time security guards monitor the school from 7:00am though 8:00pm every day, covering both the entire school day and afterschool activities. The security guards are staggered throughout the day and monitor the front desk and security cameras.
Summer Prep Coordinator	Orientation. The summer prep coordinator leads the Summer Prep Program, which is offered to incoming freshman and sophomore students. The Summer Prep Program is intended to orient new students to the TMA culture, philosophy, and staff/faculty expectations for behavior. The Summer Prep Program is also used to orient students to college expectations and to improve their academic skills. It is the first occasion where TMA staff/faculty interact with incoming students.
Teachers	Culture. Teachers are part of TMA programming and part of the overall discipline code enforcement—they administer detentions and infraction and merit points. Teachers maintain office hours and are in the hallways as students walk to classes between periods. Teachers also participate in advisory lessons.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Through the nine key staff positions and physical security system, there are a myriad of activities as part of the violence prevention model at TMA. These activities are discussed in the following section, where they are categorized according to a previously developed classification scheme² and shown in **tables 2, 3, and 4**. Each activity is listed in only one category, for parsimony, though several serve multiple functions. In summary, TMA is engaged in activities that are directed toward the provision of direct services to students, families, and staff; the organizational and environmental arrangements of the school; and the discipline and safety management techniques employed at the school. While the primary beneficiaries of the violence prevention activities are the students and faculty/staff, parents/guardians of TMA students and the community may also reap secondary benefits. However, parents/guardians and community residents are far less engaged in the TMA activities than the students and faculty/staff.

Provision of Information

Wall Postings of the Code of Conduct. Throughout the school, TMA staff has placed posters on the walls that list the behaviors that are not acceptable by school standards, which include gum chewing, fighting, and grooming. Abbreviated lists of activities that are not acceptable according to the code of conduct, considered “no brainers,” are posted in every classroom.

Student and Family Handbook. The handbook is a comprehensive list of TMA rules and guidelines.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Training

Summer Prep Program. Incoming 9th and 10th grade students participate in a five-week program during the summer to learn about the discipline code, general TMA policies, and school culture. The Summer Prep Program is also used to provide students with an orientation to college expectations and to improve their academic skills. Teachers are also provided an opportunity to establish a rapport with students before the school year begins by participating in the Summer Prep Program.

Advisory Lessons. Advisory lessons are held during school with groups of students once per week from 3:00 to 4:00pm. The lessons include team-building exercises, individual guidance, and enrichment. Classes are also used to help students develop their portfolios.

Table 2. Direct Services to Students, Families, and Staff

Category	TMA Activity
Provision of Information	Wall postings of conduct code; Student and family handbook
Curriculum, Instruction and Training	Summer Prep Program; Advisory lessons; Discipline classes
Counseling, Social Work, Psychological and Therapeutic Interventions	Counseling services
Behavioral and Behavior Modification Interventions	Success sheets; Merit and infraction point system
Recreational, Enrichment and Leisure Activities	General afterschool programs and clubs; Athletics
Individual Attention, Mentoring, Tutoring and Coaching	Homework help; Mentoring Program; Law Firm Tutoring; Law Day; Job Shadow Day

Portfolios are a compilation of students’ achievements throughout the year, used to prepare for their advancement to the next grade. At the end of the year, students give an oral presentation of their portfolio that includes a graphical representation of the pattern of their infraction and merit points and a reflection on the pattern. Every student participates in advisory lessons.

Discipline Classes. Discipline classes are held after school for approximately 90 minutes and cover conflict resolution, stress management, defense mechanisms, and self-esteem. The classes are held after school and can be used to reduce infraction points. They are mandatory for students who have received a certain number of infraction points.

Counseling, Social Work, Psychological and Therapeutic Interventions

Counseling Services. A licensed clinical social worker provides counseling services to students on a referral basis. Appointments with the counselor are also available on a walk-in basis. The counseling sessions cover a range of issues that occur inside and outside school, such as academic problems, family issues, stress, and peer conflicts. Counseling is available on an emergency and ongoing basis. The counselor is available to TMA parents/guardians as well.

Behavioral and Behavior Modification Interventions

Success Sheets. Once a student is at risk for more serious disciplinary consequences, he or she is required to use success sheets to track his or her daily behavior. The success sheets track target behaviors (e.g., prepared with class materials, followed rules, on time to class) during each class period and allow teachers to check off whether each behavior was fulfilled or not. Teachers complete and sign the success sheets each day, and the student’s parent/guardian must sign and return it to the dean. If the student’s behavior is deemed unacceptable while using the success sheets, more serious disciplinary measures are considered (e.g., behavior contract).

Merit and Infraction Point System. A system of infraction and merit points is used to track student behavior. Students receive one infraction point for every detention or uniform violation, three infraction points for every in-school suspension (ISS), and four infraction points for every out-of-school suspension (OSS). When students receive more than ten points, they are required to attend a three-hour discipline class. Students must have less than twenty infraction points to progress to the next grade. Students’ positive behavior is rewarded with merit points: one merit is equivalent to 0.25 infraction points. Student achievements are recognized in the front hallway of the school on video monitors (e.g., attendance, college admission) and TMA administrators offer various awards for academic achievement, civic involvement, and resilience. Students track and reflect on their behavior by graphing the pattern of merit and infraction points during advisory lessons.

Recreational, Enrichment and Leisure Activities

General Afterschool Programs and Clubs. Extracurricular activities meet at least once a week after school. Available clubs change annually, according to student interest. Recent clubs have included Green/Environmental Club and Debate Club. Students are provided with snacks during afterschool activities.

Athletics. Similar to the other afterschool programs and clubs, athletics are subject to student interest. Recent examples of athletic teams have included flag football, basketball, and cheerleading.

Individual Attention, Mentoring, Tutoring and Coaching

Homework Help. Afterschool tutoring is held five days a week in the library and supervised by at least one of the program staff, the librarian, and three teachers.

During this time, the students are able to use the school computers and ask for assistance with homework.

Mentoring Program. Tenth grade students who choose to participate in the Mentoring Program are matched with a trained volunteer mentor. In addition to speaking weekly, mentors and mentees meet during monthly Mentor Days and one other monthly outing. Mentors are trained on behavior management techniques.

Law Firm Tutoring. All 11th grade students visit one of six participating law firms on Tuesday evenings to have dinner, receive tutoring, and to develop a mentoring relationship with volunteers. Tutors are trained on the school discipline code and behavior management techniques. Students receive a pass/fail grade for the tutoring program.

Law Day. All 9th grade students participate in Law Day once a month, which includes a field trip to a law firm to attend workshops on legal topics, such as discrimination, bargaining/negotiation, criminal trials, and civil trials.

Job Shadow Day. All 10th grade students observe a professional for one day in their career area.

Table 3. Organizational and Environmental Arrangements

Category	TMA Activity
Reorganization of Grades, Classes or School Schedules	Locker/classroom placement
Architectural Features of the School	Clean facility and abundant windows; Fence; Single, secure entrance
Distinctive Culture or Climate for Interpersonal Exchanges	School size; Morning check-in; Afternoon dismissal
Instructional Methods or Practices	Data-driven instruction; Experiential teaching; Teaching Academy
Classroom Organization and Management Methods or Practices	Behavioral management techniques in the classroom
Intergroup Relations or Interaction between School and Community	Anti-Defamation League Program; Community service
School Composition	Extensive participation requirements and application process

Reorganization of Grades, Classes, or School Schedules

Locker/Classroom Placement. Classrooms and lockers for each grade are contained on the same floor, where the upperclassmen and lowerclassmen have classrooms and lockers on separate floors.

Architectural Features of the School

Clean Facility and Abundant Windows. The building facility and the grounds around the building are clean and well lit. Stairways and hallways are free of clutter and debris and allow students to flow through the halls without frequently bumping into each other. There is no graffiti inside the school or on the walls outside the school building.

Fence. A fence surrounds the school with an opening that leads to the front entrance.

Single, Secure Entrance. There is only one entrance into the building, which is locked and maintained by a security guard.

Distinctive Culture or Climate for Interpersonal Exchanges

School Size. The school consists of 375 students with 60 staff, which allows for a culture where teachers and staff know every student by name and vice versa, regardless of class. The school size also keeps the student-to-dean ratio small, so deans have the ability to know the students well.

Morning Check-In. The deans and academic director greet students at the front door as they enter school each day.

Afternoon Dismissal. The deans and academic director stand at school doors as students are dismissed at the end of each day.

Instructional Methods or Practice

Data-Driven Instruction. TMA teachers use internal assessments to organize lesson planning and improve student achievement.

Experiential Teaching. TMA uses various forms of experiential teaching, including field trips and mock trials to improve student achievement.

Teaching Academy. Yearly, all teachers participate in a training workshop intended to help develop their use of assertive discipline techniques, motivational techniques, and other skills.

Classroom Organization and Management Methods or Practices

Behavioral Management Techniques in the Classroom. Teachers are encouraged to use behavior management techniques in the classroom. Posters are located in each classroom to inform students of the different levels of behavior problems and the specified response.

Intergroup Relations or Interaction between School and Community

Anti-Defamation League Program (ADL). ADL is a student club where students learn leadership skills and how to facilitate workshops on prejudice and stereotypes. The club meets once per week following an introductory training session at the beginning of the school year. Some sessions are facilitated by peers.

Community Service. All TMA students are required to complete a number of community service hours each school year. Volunteering opportunities are offered through the Teen Action afterschool club. The number of required community service hours increases with grade level.

School Composition

Extensive Participation Requirements and Application Process. Students are required to complete an application for admission to TMA, although admission is guaranteed if a student graduated from a middle school. Admission is on a first-come, first-served basis. In applying to TMA, students have to agree to participate in additional activities required by the school, such as law firm tutoring and advisory lessons.

Table 4. Discipline and Safety Management

Category	TMA Activity
Rules, Policies, Regulations, Law or Enforcement	Graduated sanctions; Discipline code; Anti-violence contract; Behavior contract; Discipline hearings
Security and Surveillance	Front desk check-in; Monitoring between class periods and lunch; Public transportation station monitoring; Random searches

Rules, Policies, Regulations, Law, or Enforcement

Graduated Sanctions. Students receive punishments of increasing severity for discipline problems, including detention, ISS, OSS, behavior contracts, required discipline classes, discipline hearings, and expulsion.

Discipline Code. Discipline rules are outlined in the student handbook and on various postings throughout school. The code includes a consistent set of rules to impose sanctions on students for certain behaviors. Students may receive a variety of punishments for misbehavior, including detention, ISS, OSS, behavior contract, required discipline classes, discipline hearings, and expulsion. Any faculty or staff member can give a student a detention; only deans give out ISS and OSS. The discipline code applies when students are at school as well as when they are on their way to or from school or the public transportation station. The school has established clear, consistent, and certain consequences for any behavior that leads to violence; students will definitely receive punishment for certain behaviors.

Anti-Violence Contract. Students sign an anti-violence contract at the time of enrollment to demonstrate that they understand what is written in the discipline code and will adhere to its rules.

Behavior Contract. Students are placed on a behavior contract if they have not changed their behavior after being required to take discipline classes and to use success sheets. The behavior contract lists the offenses that violate the contract. Failure to adhere to the rules outlined in the contract may result in expulsion. The contract is signed by the student, their parent/guardian and dean.

Discipline Hearings. Discipline hearings are held in cases where expulsion is being considered, such as cases of academic dishonesty, repeated minor discipline problems, moderate discipline problems, and violations of anti-violence and behavior contracts. Three members of the school staff serve on a panel while the student's dean, a student advocate, and the student's parent/guardian present their understanding of the situation and the student. The panel determines the consequences of the student's behavior. The student has the right to appeal the decision.

Security and Surveillance

Front Desk Check-In. Students must check in with the front desk using their identification card every morning when entering the school building. All visitors and guests to TMA must also check in and out with

the front desk security guard. Visitors are given name badges while they are in the building.

Monitoring between Class Periods and Lunch. Teachers stand in the hallways during class periods, and program staff and deans monitor lunch periods.

Public Transportation Station Monitoring. A public transportation station is located directly across the street from the school. Deans often monitor the station after school dismissal to prevent incidents.

Random Searches. Random, unannounced searches occur periodically throughout the school year.

PROGRAM IMPACT

The two primary long-term outcomes of the violence prevention activities at TMA are a high-achieving academic environment among students and a safe school for students, faculty, and staff. The success of the violence prevention activities in meeting these two long-term goals is related to two important contextual factors: the unique needs and characteristics of public charter high schools and the disadvantaged neighborhood that surrounds the school grounds.

CONCLUSIONS

The assessment conducted by the Urban Institute at TMA describes the range of violence prevention approaches taking place at one school. This brief outlines the traditional and nontraditional violence prevention activities at TMA to provide guidance to other schools on activities TMA has found to be successful. Survey responses from the students and faculty at TMA demonstrate that they are receptive to the holistic violence prevention practices taking place at the school (detailed in the final report). Additional research on violence prevention processes taking place at other schools would shed further light on innovative practices happening across the country.

¹ The 2009 DC CAS results: All D.C. public high schools, reading and math proficiency of 44 and 40 percent, respectively; D.C. open enrollment public high schools, reading and math proficiency of 38 and 35 percent, respectively.

² The violence prevention activities at TMA are categorized using the Gottfredson et al. (2004) classification scheme that was established as part of the federally funded National Study of Delinquency Prevention in School. See Gottfredson et al., *Toward Safe and Orderly Schools—The National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2004).