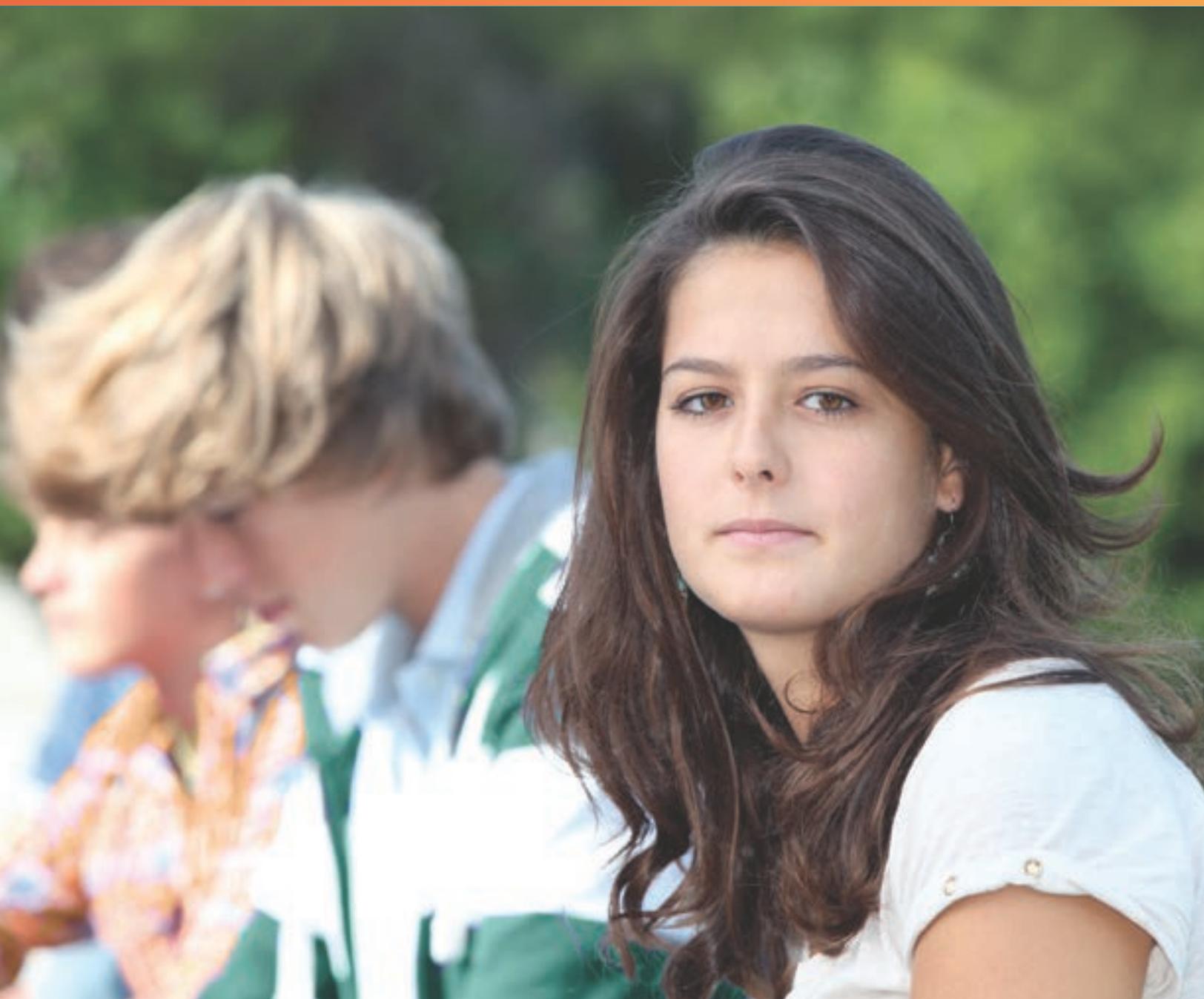




# Rhode Island's Comprehensive Teen Dating Violence Education Law

*A Policy Implementation Evaluation Report*



# Authors

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## Acknowledgments

We wish to acknowledge the commitment of the Rhode Island DELTA FOCUS State Leadership Team members, who played an integral role in helping to conceive of this report, informing its contents, participating in key informant interviews as both participants and interviewers, and providing invaluable feedback at various stages of the report. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Tara Martino and Julie Rousseau, interns who assisted with conducting and coding key informant interviews and reviewing existing teen dating violence school policy literature. We would like to thank Krista D'Amico for editing and designing this report, and Rebecca Burns for providing graphic design support.

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For decades, advocates have worked tirelessly to end domestic violence and dating violence in Rhode Island and throughout the United States. These efforts have involved changing laws, improving systems' response, raising awareness through the media, educating the public through training, and more recently, focusing on primary prevention strategies and social norms change.

Over the years, we have built multisectoral partnerships and strong collaborations with community-based organizations in order to ensure that victims of violence have access to services, support, and justice. Public and private educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, and universities, have been key collaborators in this work, particularly in the area of prevention.

Here in Rhode Island, the actions of one courageous, determined woman have led to statewide, systemic change in education. Ann Burke, a retired health educator from South Kingstown, channeled the grief of losing her beloved daughter to dating violence into a powerful piece of legislation, and her advocacy spurred unprecedented progress on this issue across the nation.

With the momentous passage in 2007 of Rhode Island's Lindsay Ann Burke Act—the first statewide teen dating violence education law in the country—it became clear that all Rhode Island schools have an obligation to ensure that their staff and students are educated in the dynamics of abuse and that they know how to respond to incidents of violence. Since its passage, at least twenty-one states have enacted similar legislation.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “[P]romoting expectations for healthy, non-violent relationships and building skills . . . can reduce risk for perpetration and victimization of intimate partner violence.” Equipped with this knowledge and determined to prevent teen dating violence before it happens in the first place, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence and its DELTA FOCUS State Leadership Team identified a need to assess the Act's current implementation and to develop recommendations for strengthening it.

It is our hope that school districts across the state will partner with the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence and our member agencies so that the recommendations outlined in this report are realized.

Together, we can ensure that all young people in Rhode Island have safe and bright futures ahead of them—because those futures are in our hands.



**Deborah DeBare**  
Executive Director



**Lucy Rios**  
Director of Prevention  
and Communications

# Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to provide Rhode Island stakeholders, domestic violence coalitions across the country who have passed similar laws, and others, with an assessment of how Rhode Island school districts are faring with their implementation of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act, Rhode Island's comprehensive teen dating violence education law and the first such law to be passed in the United States.

This report paints a picture of how the implementation is being carried out in Rhode Island, ten years after the Act's passage, and provides recommendations for how to continue to support administrators, teachers, and staff in complying with this important, potentially life-saving teen dating violence education law.

## Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this evaluation. The qualitative methods included in-depth engagement of school-level staff and administrators, district-level administrators, and key partner organizations from across the state via key informant interviews.

Quantitative methods included a secondary analysis of data from the Annual School Health Report, issued by the Rhode Island Department of Education and the Rhode Island Department of Health, in order to identify how many Rhode Island schools were in compliance with the law.

## Findings

According to data collected in the Annual School Health Report, 100% of districts reported compliance with having a teen dating violence policy between 2013 and 2017. In 2016-2017, 61.8% of districts reported having reviewed their teen dating violence policy within the past year. A full 100% of districts reported compliance with having provided teen dating violence training for staff between 2015 and 2017.

Key informants highlighted the following facilitators to implementing the Act in their schools and districts: the availability of training and curriculum materials, support from community-based organizations, and support from administrators and colleagues.

Key informants highlighted the following barriers to implementing the Act: time, competing priorities, an emphasis on prioritizing the issue of bullying to the detriment of the issue of teen dating violence, lack of coordination across school staff, lack of funding, and some teachers' discomfort with the subject of teen dating violence. Another barrier cited by key informants was the disconnect between perceptions on the administrative and leadership levels and the lived experiences of professionals working directly with students.

Our key informant interviews also helped illuminate the following areas on which to build and strengthen in order to optimally educate Rhode Island students about teen dating violence and healthy relationships: community-based resources, media and the internet as resources, beginning-of-the-year training, and parents as critical partners.

## Discussion and Recommendations

Teachers and administrators in Rhode Island care about promoting healthy relationships and ensuring the safety of the youth they educate; however, there is a disconnect between reported compliance with the Act and how schools are practically implementing the law. Drawing on our evaluation efforts and on relevant literature and practice-based knowledge from the fields of education and intimate partner violence primary prevention, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence offers the following recommendations, discussed in greater detail on pages 26-27 of this report:

- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 1.** Engage districts and schools with multiple forms of support.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 2.** Elevate the issue of teen dating violence among key policy and practice influencers in Rhode Island.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 3.** Help schools identify and implement existing evidence-based programs and promising strategies that support the development of healthy relationships among teens.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 4.** Consider the “whole village.” Collaborate across sectors, work across multiple levels of the Social-Ecological Model (i.e., individual, relationship, community, and society), and promote prevention strategies that address multiple forms of violence, including bullying, sexual violence, and teen dating violence.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 5.** Health and Wellness Committees of local school districts should elevate the issue of teen dating violence and the promotion of healthy relationships as critical elements of the district's Health education vision.

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# Introduction

## The Problem of Teen Dating Violence

Teen dating violence, a form of intimate partner violence, is a widespread public health problem with serious long- and short-term effects on those victimized by their dating partners.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines teen dating violence as physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional violence within a dating relationship, including stalking.<sup>1</sup> A national CDC survey found that 23% of females and 14% of males who ever experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner first experienced some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age.<sup>2</sup>

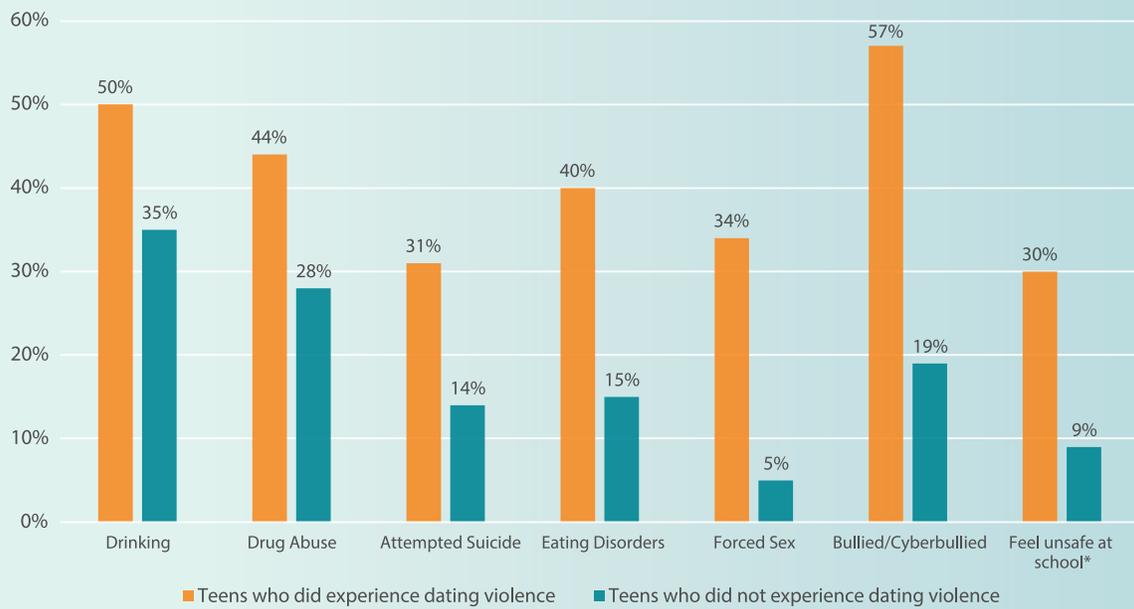
The 2013 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that approximately 10% of high school students reported physical victimization and 10% reported sexual victimization from a dating partner in the 12 months before they were surveyed.<sup>3</sup>

Rhode Island participates in CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System via the Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which tracks priority health risk behaviors that contribute distinctly to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

In Rhode Island, among students who dated or went out with someone during the 12 months before the survey, 8.8% experienced physical dating violence, including being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon on purpose.<sup>5</sup> Nearly 10% of high school students (9.6%) experienced sexual dating violence, including kissing, touching, or being physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to by someone they were dating or going out with.<sup>6</sup>

Research demonstrates that teen victims of dating violence are more likely than their non-abused peers to smoke, use drugs, engage in unhealthy diet behaviors, engage in risky sexual behaviors, and attempt or consider suicide.<sup>7</sup> Rhode Island teens who reported dating violence victimization also reported being bullied or cyberbullied at higher rates (57%) than their peers who reported no teen dating violence victimization (19%), as well as higher rates of drinking (50% versus 35%), drug abuse (44% versus 28%), eating disorders (40% versus 15%), forced sex (34% versus 5%), attempted suicide (31% versus 14%), and feeling unsafe at school (30% versus 9%) (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1. Risk Factors for Teens Experiencing Dating Violence in Rhode Island**



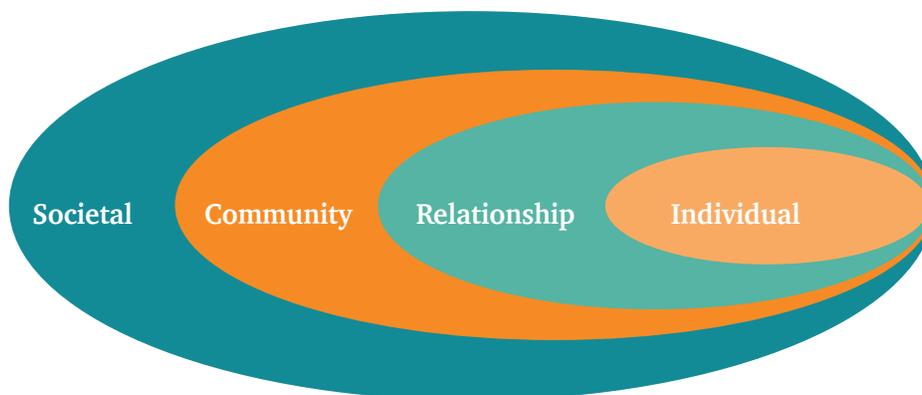
Source: RI Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2013

\*INCLUDES THOSE THREATENED OR INJURED WITH A WEAPON IN THE PAST 30 DAYS

## Community-Level Prevention Strategies

Teen dating violence does not occur in a vacuum. Multiple forms of violence are interconnected, impact each other, and can be experienced simultaneously by victims and communities. Strategies that build protective factors for one form of violence often address multiple forms of violence.<sup>9</sup>

Teen dating violence prevention strategies take place at multiple levels of the Social-Ecological Model (Figure 2). Such strategies may address the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels.<sup>10</sup> This report focuses on Rhode Island’s implementation of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act, a school-level education and prevention strategy situated at the community level of the Social-Ecological Model.



**Figure 2. Social-Ecological Model**

## History of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act

On July 3, 2007, the Lindsay Ann Burke Act was officially enacted by the Rhode Island General Assembly<sup>11</sup> and became the first state law in the United States mandating that there be teen dating violence policies and education in every public middle school and high school across the state.

The Act defines dating violence as “a pattern of behavior where one person uses threats of, or actually uses, physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse to control his or her dating partner.” See Appendix A for the complete text of the Act (RIGL § 16-21-30).

The Act requires that (1) each school district establish a specific policy to address incidents of dating violence involving students at school by December 1, 2008, and that (2) all administrators, teachers, nurses, and mental health staff at the middle school and high school levels be trained in dating violence. Each school district must verify compliance with the Rhode Island Department of Education on an annual basis through the Annual School Health Report. Finally, (3) each school district must incorporate dating violence education that is age-appropriate into the annual health curriculum framework for students in grades seven through twelve.

In 2012, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) produced its first intimate partner violence statewide prevention plan, *Addressing the Violence Before It Starts*, in which the RICADV and its State Steering Committee identified systems change and youth-focused prevention goals, among others, as state priority areas.

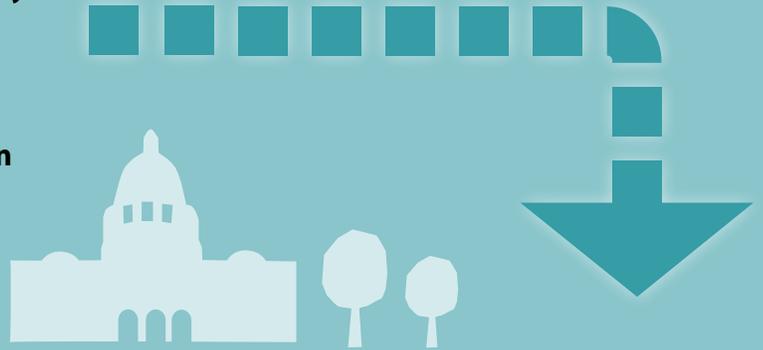
In 2013, in response to these identified priority areas and with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) DELTA FOCUS grant, the RICADV commenced planning to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the Act in an effort to support schools.



# Timeline of Significant Dates & Milestones

## 2005

Lindsay Ann Burke, of North Kingstown, Rhode Island, is murdered by her ex-boyfriend. This tragedy is the catalyst for Ann Burke, Lindsay's mother, to work with the Rhode Island Attorney General and the Rhode Island General Assembly to pass the Lindsay Ann Burke Act.



## July 3, 2007

The Rhode Island General Assembly officially enacts the Lindsay Ann Burke Act, the first such law to be passed in the United States.



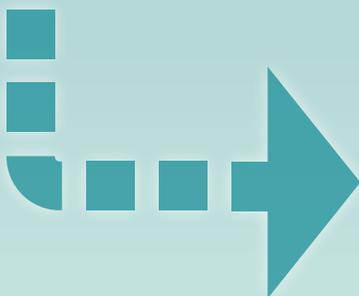
## April 1, 2008

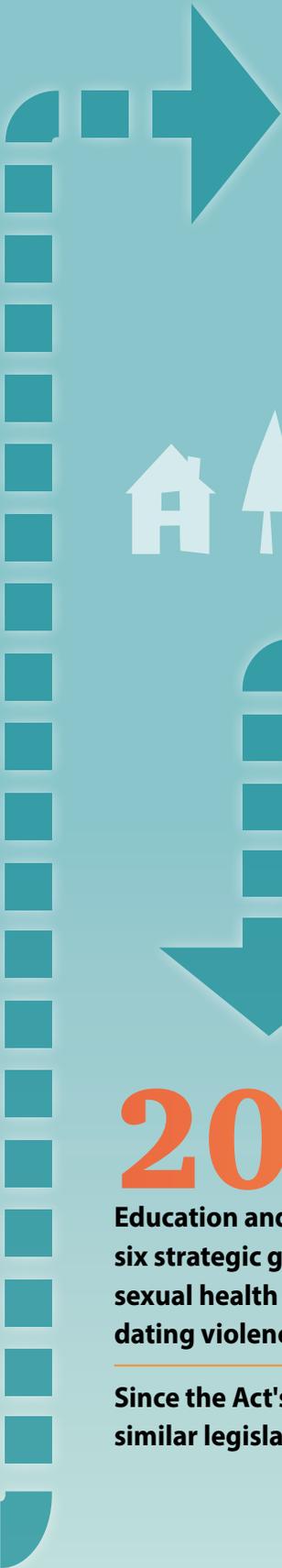
As required by the Act, the Rhode Island Department of Education develops a model teen dating violence policy guidance document, *A Guide to Preventing Bullying, Teen Dating Violence, and Sexual Violence in Rhode Island Schools*,<sup>12</sup> to assist school districts in developing policies for dating violence reporting and response.



## Dec. 1, 2008

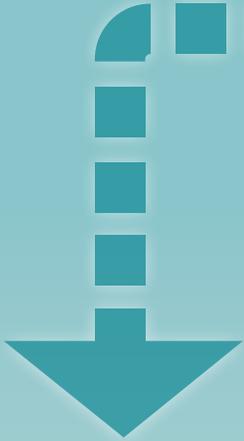
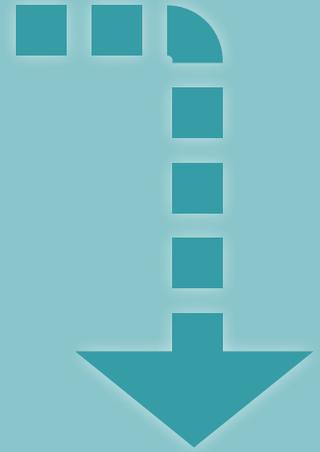
School-specific policies must be established by this date, as required by the Act.





# 2012

The Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV), in partnership with its State Steering Committee, produces *Addressing the Violence Before It Starts*, Rhode Island's first intimate partner violence (IPV) statewide prevention plan, identifying systems change and youth-focused prevention goals as state priority areas.



# 2013

The RICADV is awarded the DELTA FOCUS grant, a five-year IPV prevention grant funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The implementation of the Act is identified as a critical component of state-level IPV prevention, with stakeholders wanting to better understand how the Act is being implemented.

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President Obama designates February 2013 National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month.

# 2016

The Rhode Island Department of Education and the Rhode Island Department of Health identify six strategic goals to serve as the foundation for future adolescent sexual health planning activities in Rhode Island. "Reducing teen dating violence among adolescents" is one of these six goals.<sup>13</sup>

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Since the Act's passage, at least twenty-one states have enacted similar legislation.<sup>14</sup>



## Purpose

The aim of this report is to provide Rhode Island stakeholders—administrators, educators, state agencies, state legislators, the Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund, youth-serving organizations, and member agencies of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence—along with domestic violence coalitions across the country who have passed similar laws, and others, with an assessment of how Rhode Island school districts are faring with their implementation of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act.

This report paints a picture of how the implementation is being carried out in Rhode Island, ten years after the Act's passage, including facilitators of implementation, barriers, ways in which the Act is currently being regulated, and recommendations for how to continue to support district-level and building-level administrators, teachers, and staff in their pursuit of complying with this important, potentially life-saving teen dating violence education law.

## Context

With 1,212 square miles and a population of 1,056,426,<sup>15</sup> Rhode Island is the smallest state in the United States and the second-most densely populated of the 50 states.<sup>16</sup> Within Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns are 66 public Local Education Agencies (LEAs) or districts, comprised of 32 regular single-municipality school districts, 25 charter schools, four regional school districts, four state-operated schools, and one regional collaborative.<sup>17</sup>

**Rhode Island public school student population sociodemographic characteristics.** Fifty-nine percent of Rhode Island public school students identify as white, 25% as Hispanic, 8% as African American, 4% as multiracial, 3% as Asian, and 1% as Native American. Forty-eight percent of Rhode Island public school students are eligible for subsidized lunch, 15% receive special education services, and 8% receive ESL/bilingual services.<sup>18</sup>

We conducted a review of the formal and informal literature and found no other evaluation of a statewide teen dating violence policy in the United States. This finding is consistent with what we have learned from within our community of practice with domestic violence coalitions across the country. Rhode Island is the first state to have passed such a teen dating violence education law, and as such, it is reasonable that Rhode Island would be the first state to conduct such an evaluation.



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# Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this evaluation. The qualitative methods included in-depth engagement of a small number of school staff, administrators, and key partner organizations from across the state via key informant interviews.

Quantitative methods included a secondary analysis of data from the Annual School Health Report, issued by the Rhode Island Department of Education and the Rhode Island Department of Health, in order to identify how many Rhode Island schools were in compliance with the Lindsay Ann Burke Act.

Initially, we planned to seek information from school-level professionals using a survey format. In 2013, with the support of the DELTA FOCUS State Leadership Team ("the Leadership Team"), the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence set out to conduct a survey with school professionals on schools' site-based implementation of the Act.

While field testing the survey, reaching the intended respondents of Health and Physical Education teachers and school administrators proved to be extremely difficult. We ultimately lacked the ability to reach the right respondents with our survey, and even with those who completed the survey, we were not able to collect the richness and precision of data we were seeking. We believe this challenge stemmed from the lack of a mandate that schools respond to our survey. Competing priorities in overburdened schools likely reduced the response rate during the pilot phase.



## Key Informant Interviews

We conducted key informant interviews with a range of professionals who play key roles in the implementation of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act on the school and district levels. As shown in Table 1, we spoke with district-level administrators and with school-level staff and administrators, including Health and Physical Education teachers, guidance staff, principals, and assistant principals, from core city districts and rural, semi-rural, and urban municipalities.

Questions on the key informant interview addressed how the school was implementing the Act and focused on whether the school had an existing teen dating violence policy, whether all school staff were trained on the policy, whether Health educators received training in teaching about teen dating violence, and whether the district's Health curriculum included teen dating violence. We also asked key informants about barriers and facilitators to implementing the law and what kinds of supports the school would find helpful.

A sample of questions includes “Does your school have a policy to address incidents of dating violence that occur at school?”, “Does your school provide dating violence training to administrators, teachers, nurses, and mental health staff at the middle school and high school levels?”, “How are new hires trained?”, “Are there specific facilitators or factors that help your school implement the Act?”, and “Are there specific barriers or factors that make it difficult to implement the Act?” See Appendix B for the complete key informant interview protocol.

Additional key informant interviews were conducted with lead staff from key partner organizations who work on the issue of teen dating violence in Rhode Island. The purpose of these interviews was to gather information about the Rhode Island school and state context in order to craft actionable recommendations for this report.

Key informant interviews and focused discussions were typically conducted in-person by two people, with one acting as the interview facilitator and the other simultaneously typing the exact content of the interview. Occasionally, interviews took place over the phone, and occasionally, one person served as both the interviewer and note taker.

**Sampling.** We used purposive sampling for selecting our key informants. In consultation with the Leadership Team, we identified a wide range of types of schools and districts we wanted to interview in order to obtain as varied a range of responses as possible. As discussed in an earlier section of this report, Rhode Island has 32 regular single-municipality school districts and four regional school districts. There are an additional 30 districts made up of charter schools, state-operated schools, and one regional collaborative.

In designing our sample, we focused on regular single-municipality school districts and regional school districts, aiming to interview professionals from five to seven districts that varied from rural to suburban/semi-rural to urban and urban core. The term “core city” is a designation used by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and other organizations to identify the four cities in Rhode Island where greater than 25% of the children live in poverty.<sup>19</sup> In keeping with the commitment of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence to lift up the voices and concerns of all Rhode Islanders, especially those disproportionately impacted by violence, our sample included professionals who serve in two of the four core city districts.

In the construction of our purposive sample, we aimed to intentionally interview at least one school that was known among members of the Leadership Team to be doing an exemplary job. One such school was not a public school. Given that key personnel at this school were willing to speak with us, we made the decision to include this school in our sample.

**Table 1. School-level Staff and Administrators and District-level Administrators who Participated in Key Informant Interviews**

Schools/Districts	Role of Key Personnel Interviewed
1 high school in a semi-rural community	– Guidance Chair – Health/Physical Education Chair
1 high school in an urban community	– Health/Physical Education teacher
1 regional high school in a rural community	– Health/Physical Education Chair
1 regional high school in a second rural community	– Assistant Principal – Guidance counselor – Health/Physical Education teacher
1 middle school in a Rhode Island core city	– Health/Physical Education teachers (2)
1 Catholic middle and high school	– High school Health/Physical Education teacher – School administrator
1 district-level Education Department in a Rhode Island core city	– Education Department administrators (2)

In addition to the seven key informant interviews conducted with school professionals, we also conducted key informant interviews and focused discussions with key staff from partner organizations across the state, as shown in Table 2, who sit on the Leadership Team and have a knowledge of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act from their varied roles and perspectives.

These key informant interviews and focused discussions were conducted in order to gain additional information and to provide context for this report. The key informants helped clarify areas of the implementation that were unclear to us, such as the extent to which the Rhode Island Department of Education and the Rhode Island Department of Health regulate the implementation of the Act. They helped us understand which systems are in place to collect data from the schools on their compliance with the law and how we could obtain such data.

Their perspectives were as educators and leaders who were involved with the passage of the Act, as well as those who have provided technical assistance and training to school professionals on teen dating violence and sexual violence. Each of these key informant interviews and focused discussions added to our understanding of the Act and factors surrounding its implementation, and helped guide our thinking in terms of interpreting the data and making recommendations.

**Table 2. Partner Organizations who Participated in Key Informant Interviews**

Organization	Role of Key Personnel Interviewed
Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund	– President
Day One	– Senior Prevention staff (1)
Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence	– Senior Prevention staff (1)
Rhode Island Department of Education	– Adolescent Health administrator
Rhode Island Department of Health	– Adolescent Health administrators (2) – Violence and Injury Prevention Program administrator



## Qualitative Analysis

**Interview transcripts.** Interview transcripts were analyzed by the lead author and a student intern using NVivo qualitative software. Predetermined codes were co-generated by the authors in consultation with the Leadership Team. The lead author and a student intern generated emergent codes and discussed these codes for agreement. Emergent codes were shared with the Leadership Team for their feedback on both codes and ensuing themes.

Examples of predetermined codes are “implementation facilitators,” “implementation barriers,” “implementation support,” “technical assistance needed,” and “suggestions for additional support.” During the coding process, emergent codes such as “compliance,” “professional development,” “staff collaboration,” “time as barrier,” and “support from administration” were generated.

During the coding and preliminary writing process, multiple rounds of preliminary codes and themes were discussed among data collectors and with the Leadership Team. Ongoing framing of the data was discussed with the Leadership Team as the themes and reporting format took shape.

**Document review.** We reviewed documents, including the text of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act (RIGL § 16-21-30)<sup>20</sup> and the Rhode Island Department of Education’s *A Guide to Preventing Bullying, Teen Dating Violence, and Sexual Violence in Rhode Island Schools*.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, we reviewed internal documents maintained by Ann Burke, President of the Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund, which include the names of schools whose staff have participated in teen dating violence prevention professional development provided by Ms. Burke.

Also included in our document review were a variety of individual district policies on teen dating violence contained in student handbooks, as well as other items, such as web links to student and staff teen dating violence resources, that were shown to us during key informant interviews.

We used the same predetermined and emergent codes as those used for the key informant interviews. We also generated additional emergent codes as warranted.

## Quantitative Analysis

We requested and accessed publicly available data from the Rhode Island Department of Education’s Annual School Health Report, an “annual survey (with the Department of Health) that addresses all health and safety issues of compliance due to regulation [and] legislation . . .”.<sup>22</sup>

The Annual School Health Report includes two questions pertaining to the oversight of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act. One question asks the respondent to verify whether their district has a teen dating violence policy and to provide the year it was revised. The other question asks whether the district has provided the required teen dating violence training for designated school personnel, with yes/no response categories.

The Rhode Island Department of Education expects districts to review and revise their policies annually. Once a school submits a completed report, an electronic response system confirms with the sender whether the report is complete or directs the sender to issues that need to be addressed.

Districts included in our secondary analysis were regular single-municipality school districts and regional school districts containing middle schools and high schools. Of the 32 regular single-municipality districts, two were excluded from the analysis because they did not have middle schools and high schools. Also excluded from the analysis were charter schools, state-operated schools, and a regional collaborative. We conducted counts of the data by district by academic year.



# Findings

## Annual School Health Report Data

According to data collected in the Annual School Health Report,<sup>23</sup> 100% of districts reported compliance with having a teen dating violence policy between 2013 and 2017, as shown in Table 3.

In 2016-2017, 61.8% of districts reported having reviewed their teen dating violence policy within the past year, as shown in Table 4.

As shown in Table 5, 100% of districts reported compliance with having provided teen dating violence training for staff between 2015 and 2017.



**Table 3. Percent of RI School Districts that Report Having a Current Teen Dating Violence (TDV) Policy<sup>a,b</sup>**

	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2015 <sup>c</sup>	2015-2016	2016-2017
Has a TDV policy	88.2 (30)	88.2 (30)	100 (34)	100 (34)	100 (34)
Is developing a TDV policy	2.9 (1)	2.9 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Data missing	8.8 (3)	8.8 (3)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)

<sup>a</sup>n = 34 (30 regular single-municipality districts and 4 regional districts)

<sup>b</sup>Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

<sup>c</sup>Data for academic years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 were reported as 2013-2015.

**Table 4. Percent of RI School Districts that Report Having Reviewed Their Teen Dating Violence (TDV) Policy in the Past Year<sup>a,b</sup>**

	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2015 <sup>c</sup>	2015-2016	2016-2017
TDV policy reviewed within the past year	64.7 (22)	85.3 (29)	97.1 (33)	91.2 (31)	61.8 (21)

<sup>a</sup>n = 34 (30 regular single-municipality districts and 4 regional districts)

<sup>b</sup>Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

<sup>c</sup>Data for academic years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 were reported as 2013-2015.

**Table 5. Percent of RI School Districts that Report Having Provided Teen Dating Violence (TDV) Training for Staff<sup>a,b</sup>**

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-15 <sup>c</sup>	2015-16	2016-17
Provided TDV staff training	76.5 (26)	85.3 (29)	76.5 (26)	91.2 (31)	94.1 (32)	97.1 (33)	100 (34)	100 (34)
Did not provide TDV staff training	14.7 (5)	0 (0)	5.9 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Data missing	8.8 (3)	14.7 (5)	17.6 (6)	8.8 (3)	5.9 (2)	2.9 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)

<sup>a</sup>n = 34 (30 regular single-municipality districts and 4 regional districts)

<sup>b</sup>Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

<sup>c</sup>Data for academic years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 were reported as 2013-2015.

## Facilitators of Implementation

Facilitators of implementation included teachers having the needed training and curriculum resources to teach their students about teen dating violence. Most key informants spoke about how they valued trainings and materials provided by and through community-based organizations, such as the Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund, the Katie Brown Educational Program, member agencies of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and Day One.

Other facilitators included administrators who support teachers in their efforts to teach about teen dating violence. Key informants talked about the supportive colleagues who partner within the Health disciplines, such as Health and Physical Education, and across subject areas, such as English/Language Arts. Guidance staff were often referenced as critical partners when it comes to identifying situations where teens are experiencing dating violence and offering support to teens and their families.

Other facilitators included having teachers on staff who care about teen dating violence and want their students to be equipped to have healthy relationships, recognize dating relationships that are not healthy, and know how to get help if they are experiencing dating violence.

**Training and curriculum materials.** Teachers and guidance staff talked about training and curriculum materials as key facilitators in helping them effectively teach students about teen dating violence.

*“Grades nine to twelve get educated [on teen dating violence] annually. We use the scope and sequence for teaching that Ann [Burke] recommends. Because it’s taught year after year, the kids know the information, so we have to mix it up for them. We make them create a brochure, we give them quizzes, we do the contest in the schools to evaluate student learning in the area [of teen dating violence].” – Health/Physical Education teacher, urban high school*

**Support from community-based organizations.** Community-based organizations were frequently referenced as vital facilitators to helping teachers communicate with their students about teen dating violence.

*“In the past, we have worked with Sojourner House. It was called SOS, Share Our Strength. It was time within the school structure during the day . . . I’d like to see more.”  
– Guidance counselor, high school*

*“We both attended [Ann Burke’s training] seminar at Rhode Island College, twice. The first time was for the information, the second time to really get a better idea of [how to implement it]. I would go again next year if I could.” – Health/Physical Education teacher, middle school in a Rhode Island core city*

**Support from administrators and colleagues.** Teachers and guidance staff cited support from their administrators and colleagues as a crucial facilitator.

*“We, in general, have good support from our school administration to do stuff like this [teen dating violence education]. [There are] no barriers to talking to the kids about anything.”*

*– Guidance Chair, semi-rural high school*

*“The way we teach Health, there’s [a number] of us. We teach four senior Health classes. We all follow [the Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund’s curriculum scope and sequence]. We ask each other questions on how to improve instruction.”*

*– Health/Physical Education teacher, rural regional high school*



## Barriers to Implementation

Barriers to implementation included time and competing priorities, the widespread perception of an emphasis on bullying over teen dating violence, the lack of coordination across school staff, and the lack of funding.

Additional barriers included some teachers' discomfort with the subject of teen dating violence, as well as the disconnect between state-level and district-level administrators' perceptions of the implementation and the lived experiences of teachers "in the trenches."

**Time and competing priorities.** Teachers and administrators cited the barriers of competing priorities, such as state and national testing, and limited class time for Health education as factors that make it difficult to adequately teach students about teen dating violence. Health and Physical Education teachers are including teen dating violence in their curricula, but different schools have different allotments of time for Health education.

*"Time is a big barrier for us. I am sure it's a big barrier everywhere. For kids to only get a semester of Physical Education and Health . . . this is what they need: dating violence, obesity, [and so on], yet it's the first thing [administrators] want to throw out the door."*  
– Health/Physical Education teacher, high school

*"I'm not saying [it's] because [the] supports aren't there. It's more about the time."*  
– Guidance counselor, high school

*"PARCC, NECAP, AP [classes], digital portfolio, exhibitions, children, weather is getting warmer. Some things just fall to the bottom of the list."* – Assistant Principal, high school

*"I think it's the competing priorities. PARCC, RIDE, etc. There are only so many days [in the school year]. After hours, you have to pay [teachers to participate in professional development]. The competing priorities . . . we would love to hear how different districts handle that and how they fit it in."* – District-level administrator



**Emphasis on bullying.** The emphasis on bullying, both nationally and at the state level, and the lack of emphasis on teen dating violence was a theme consistently raised by school staff. Some of our key informants pointed out that bullying is a key priority for schools, and as a result, teen dating violence gets less of an emphasis.

*“Whether it’s cyberbullying, [the topic of bullying] is everywhere. It’s in everyone’s strategic plan. If there is a way to make a connection between teen dating violence and bullying, you can get the word out more, even if tangentially. When I graduated from the Graduate School of Education, that’s what the keynote speaker talked about, talked about bullying.”*

*– Adolescent Health administrator, Rhode Island Department of Health*

**Lack of coordination across school staff.** Key informants told us that, across the entire school staff, members of their staff know that their school has a teen dating violence policy and are familiar with what the policy contains, while in other schools, every member of the staff is not necessarily aware of the policy.

**Lack of funding.** State administrators stated that there is no funding, neither federal nor state-level, allocated for the oversight of the implementation.

**Some teachers’ discomfort with the subject of teen dating violence.** Several key informants said that a barrier to effectively teaching about teen dating violence is that some teachers are uncomfortable with the subject because of their discomfort talking about intimate partner violence and topics surrounding sexuality with their students.

**Disconnect between what is meant by “compliance” and the lived experiences of professionals working directly with students.** In terms of what is being done to teach children and youth about teen dating violence, there is a disconnect between perceptions on the leadership and administrative levels (e.g., the Rhode Island Department of Education, district-level and school-level administrators) and the experiences of professionals who work directly with students. The topic of teen dating violence is not necessarily being addressed in every grade from seven through twelve. The training of staff, both seasoned and new, is not always consistent across school staff. School professionals across the building are not always familiar with the teen dating violence policy and protocols and do not necessarily know what to do in the event of teen dating violence.



## Areas on which to Build and Strengthen

**Community-based resources.** The issue of resources was raised across most interviews. Educators mentioned the help they have received from community-based agencies, such as the Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund, Day One, the Katie Brown Educational Program, and member agencies of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which provide training and support.

**Media and the internet as resources.** Several educators talked about the value of communicating with students within the school environment about teen dating violence via posters and web-based classroom management tools. Some teachers provide students with links to web resources for the students to access on their own time.

*“I think maybe some posters, stuff that you can put it where [the students] walk by, [so it’s] a continual reminder. Maybe posters that are up, flyers that you can hand out . . . stuff that’s up, that’s visible.” – Health/Physical Education teacher*

**Beginning-of-the-year training.** Most of the teachers we interviewed suggested that their schools should have a training at the beginning of the year to make all staff aware of the policy in place around teen dating violence.

**Parents as critical partners.** Most of the school professionals reported that they do not educate parents; however, when we asked this question, teachers and administrators conveyed interest in involving parents more.

*“I think what [my colleague] had mentioned, if we were able to bring a guest speaker in, somebody for the students to have a conversation with, someone who has been through [teen dating violence]. Maybe a student thing during the day, a parent thing at night.”  
– Health/Physical Education Chair, semi-rural high school*





# Discussion & Recommendations

Based on our interviews with Rhode Island administrators, teachers, and community-based organizations, it is clear that educational leaders and youth-serving professionals care about the well-being of teens in our communities. There is, however, a disconnect between reported compliance with the Lindsay Ann Burke Act and how schools are practically implementing the law.

The key informant interviews we conducted provided a window into some of the “on the ground” challenges faced by teachers and school-based professionals who are trying to educate young people about, and safeguard them from, teen dating violence. One important concern raised by key informants is the lack of visibility of districts’ teen dating violence policies within the schools. While some key informants appeared clear on their districts’ policies and protocols, other school personnel indicated being unsure whether all staff know about their districts’ policies or what to do in the event of teen dating violence.

We also learned from key informants that the topic of teen dating violence is not necessarily being addressed in every grade from seven through twelve. Teachers feel that they are sporadically covering teen dating violence across the curriculum but that the materials and resources they have for implementing the Act are limited, and that they need additional, varied resources and support to effectively include teen dating violence in their classroom instruction.

Teachers and administrators care about promoting healthy relationships and ensuring the safety of the youth they educate, but they cite the constraints of time and competing priorities as barriers to optimally educating students about teen dating violence and healthy relationships.

In a recently published resource, *Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence*, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides an analysis of the research demonstrating that different forms of violence, such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child maltreatment, bullying, and suicidal behavior, are interconnected and often share root causes.<sup>24</sup> Such literature points us towards prevention efforts that work across multiple levels of the Social-Ecological Model to prevent all types of violence and that consider people in the context of their home, neighborhood, and larger community. This approach to prevention is congruent with the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model, a collaboration between ASCD (formerly the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) and the CDC that approaches children’s education and health holistically.<sup>25</sup>

The Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence offers the following recommendations, which draw on the facilitators and barriers raised during our evaluation efforts and on the relevant literature and practice-based knowledge from the fields of education and intimate partner violence primary prevention.

## **RECOMMENDATION 1. Engage districts and schools with multiple forms of support.**

- ▶ District-level professionals, such as superintendents, principals, and curriculum directors, should conduct needs assessments with educators and administrators to systematically identify desired supports in teaching about teen dating violence.
- ▶ A collaboration of partner agencies and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) should convene a conference or hold meetings where administrators and staff can network with peers from across the state to share strategies on implementing the Lindsay Ann Burke Act.
- ▶ RIDE should provide resources for training administrators and staff on policy, teaching, and curriculum supports.
- ▶ The Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV), the Katie Brown Educational Program, and Day One should work with RIDE to identify, designate, and maintain a highly visible hub for sharing information about evidence-based curricula, best practices, and promising strategies for preventing teen dating violence.
- ▶ RIDE, the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), the RICADV, the Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund, the Katie Brown Educational Program, and Day One should collaborate to provide technical assistance to curriculum directors and assistant superintendents to support their districts' Health and Physical Education staff. For example, technical assistance may include helping districts update their curriculum materials and providing training opportunities for staff.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2. Elevate the issue of teen dating violence among key policy and practice influencers in Rhode Island.**

- ▶ Key policy and practice influencers, such as RIDE, RIDOH, and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, should highlight teen dating violence in publications and data collection (e.g., Youth Risk Behavior Survey and other district-level and state-level surveys).
- ▶ RIDE and RIDOH should publicly share their action steps to address strategic goal four, "Reduce teen dating violence among adolescents," of their *Adolescent Sexual Health: 2016-2020 Rhode Island Profile*, released in December 2016.<sup>26</sup>
- ▶ The Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund, the RICADV, and Day One should work with RIDE to offer schools prominently-positioned online teen dating violence professional development tools.
- ▶ RIDE, RIDOH, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, Day One, and other state partners should help elevate teen dating violence as an issue that is as equally important as bullying and as part of a developmental continuum of interrelated forms of violence.

**RECOMMENDATION 3. Help schools identify and implement existing evidence-based programs and promising strategies that support the development of healthy relationships among teens.**

- ▶ The Rhode Island General Assembly should increase the Domestic Violence Prevention Fund to continue to fund primary prevention and to support educator and administrator training, technical assistance, and ongoing professional development on teen dating violence.
- ▶ The Leadership Team and RIDE should assist schools in recognizing existing quality prevention programming that works across multiple shared risk and protective factors—beyond narrowly-defined categorical funding areas—and promote those programs as important elements of comprehensive prevention strategies.

**RECOMMENDATION 4. Consider the “whole village.” Collaborate across sectors, work across multiple levels of the Social-Ecological Model (i.e., individual, relationship, community, and society), and promote prevention strategies that address multiple forms of violence, including bullying, sexual violence, and teen dating violence.**

- ▶ Educational leaders should support school climate initiatives that promote student well-being and connected school communities.
- ▶ Schools should convene cross-disciplinary planning teams to develop units across the disciplines that address multiple forms of violence.
- ▶ Districts should include teen dating violence when revising their strategic plans.
- ▶ Health and Wellness Committees of local school districts should engage parents and community members on the issue of teen dating violence and its intersections with multiple forms of violence.

**RECOMMENDATION 5. Health and Wellness Committees of local school districts should elevate the issue of teen dating violence and the promotion of healthy relationships as critical elements of the district’s Health education vision.**

These committees should mobilize their members to:

- ▶ Hold districts accountable to prioritize Health education as an area of wellness that is as equally important as Physical Education to students’ well-being.
- ▶ Engage parents and community members to become familiar with the content of their district’s Health education curriculum, including that which pertains to teen dating violence and healthy relationships.
- ▶ Gain a better understanding of how each district is implementing the Act in order to identify areas that are successful and areas that need strengthening.



CHARLHO HIGH SCHOOL

# Chariho High School: A Case Example

Stakeholders told us that they would like to see a case example of a Rhode Island school that is doing an exemplary job of implementing the Lindsay Ann Burke Act.

We identified Chariho High School, in the Chariho Regional School District, as such a site because of its multifaceted approach to preventing and addressing teen dating violence.

The following examples are facets of a comprehensive approach to addressing teen dating violence.

- ▶ **Using Data.** Chariho High School administrators and staff use available district-level data on teen dating violence and on risk and protective factors to guide their policies and practices.
- ▶ **Training All School Adults for a Whole-School Protocol.** All teachers and staff are trained in their district's protocol on how to respond to incidents of teen dating violence.
- ▶ **Implementing Curriculum.** Chariho High School's curriculum has a clear scope and sequence, teaching about teen dating violence in a developmentally appropriate way across every grade level.
- ▶ **Fostering a School Culture of Teen Dating Violence Prevention Outside of the Classroom.** The Chariho Theater Group was a 2012 recipient of the Champions for Change Award during Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month. The group received the award for its work to engage and educate students at Chariho High School in challenging norms that support violence in dating relationships, through the annual production of a play. The district also regularly participates in the Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund's annual poster contest, which engages youth in raising awareness about the issue of teen dating violence and makes the issue more visible in the community.



## Limitations

As with every evaluation, ours has limitations. The key informant interviews conducted with school and district personnel can help us paint a picture of the self-reported experiences of the selected key informants from a wide range of contexts and circumstances; however, the data collected in these interviews are not generalizable to the entire population of Rhode Island Health and Physical Education educators, guidance staff, or administrators.

We made substantial efforts in the sampling process to connect with pre-identified diverse schools across Rhode Island; however, it is possible that the schools which we contacted repeatedly but which were not willing to speak with us might have concerns, challenges, or perspectives that were vastly different from those of the key informants who agreed to be interviewed.

There are several limitations with the Annual School Health Report data. The data are self-reported by administrators and educators, with no accompanying documentation to demonstrate further details of how the schools are meeting the requirements. The first three years of data (i.e., 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011), relating to whether or not the school had a teen dating violence policy, were missing due to changes in data collection systems that began in 2011. As such, we were unable to determine how districts complied with the Lindsay Ann Burke Act during the three earliest years of implementation.

Finally, our analyses were conducted on regular single-municipality and regional school districts. Charter schools, state-operated schools, and a regional collaborative were not included in our analyses.





# Appendix A

**Chapter 490**  
**2007 -- S 0875 SUBSTITUTE B**  
**Enacted 07/03/07**

**AN ACT**  
**RELATING TO EDUCATION - DATING VIOLENCE "LINDSAY ANN BURKE ACT"**

**Introduced By:** Senators Lanzi, Paiva-Weed, Perry, Gallo, and Goodwin

**Date Introduced:** March 20, 2007

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

**CHAPTER 85**

**LINDSAY ANN BURKE ACT**

**16-85-1. Short title.** – This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Lindsay Ann Burke Act."

**16-85-2. Legislative findings.** – The general assembly hereby finds, determines and declares that when a student is a victim of dating violence, his or her academic life suffers and his or her safety at school is jeopardized. The general assembly therefore finds that a policy to create an environment free of dating violence shall be a part of each school district. It is the intent of the general assembly to enact legislation that would require each school district to establish a policy for responding to incidents of dating violence and to provide dating violence education to students, parents, staff, faculty and administrators, in order to prevent dating violence and to address incidents involving dating violence. All students have a right to work and study in a safe, supportive environment that is free from harassment, intimidation and violence.

SECTION 2. Chapter 16-21 of the General Laws entitled "Health and Safety of Pupils" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

**16-21-30. Dating violence policy.** – (a) As used in this section:

(1) "Dating violence" means a pattern of behavior where one person uses threats of, or actually uses, physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse to control his or her dating partner.

(2) "Dating partner" means any person, regardless of gender, involved in an intimate relationship with another primarily characterized by the expectation of affectionate involvement whether casual, serious or long-term.

(3) "At school" means in a classroom, on or immediately adjacent to school premises, on a school bus or other school-related vehicle, at an official school bus stop, or at any school-sponsored activity or event whether or not it is on school grounds.

(b) The department of education shall develop a model dating violence policy to assist school districts in developing policies for dating violence reporting and response. The model policy shall be issued on or before April 1, 2008.

(c) Each school district shall establish a specific policy to address incidents of dating violence involving students at school by December 1, 2008. Each school district shall verify compliance with the department of education on an annual basis through the annual school health report.

(1) Such policy shall include, but not be limited to, a statement that dating violence will not be tolerated, dating violence reporting procedures, guidelines to responding to at school incidents of dating violence and discipline procedures specific to such incidents.

(2) To ensure notice of the school district's dating violence policy, the policy shall be published in any school district policy and handbook that sets forth the comprehensive rules, procedures and standards of conduct for students at school.

(d) Each school district shall provide dating violence training to all administrators, teachers, nurses and mental health staff at the middle and high school levels. Upon the recommendation of the administrator, other staff may be included or may attend the training on a volunteer basis. The dating violence training shall include, but not be limited to, basic principles of dating violence, warning signs of dating violence and the school district's dating violence policy, to ensure that they are able to appropriately respond to incidents of dating violence at school. Thereafter, this training shall be provided yearly to all newly hired staff deemed appropriate to receive the training by the school's administration.

(e) Each school district shall inform the students' parents or legal guardians of the school district's dating violence policy. If requested, the school district shall provide the parents or legal guardians with the school district's dating violence policy and relevant information. It is strongly recommended that the school district provide parent awareness training.

(f) This section does not prevent a victim from seeking redress under any other available law, either civil or criminal. This section does not create or alter any tort liability.

SECTION 3. Chapter 16-22 of the General Laws entitled "Curriculum" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

**16-22-24. Dating violence education.** – (a) Each school district shall incorporate dating violence education that is age-appropriate into the annual health curriculum framework for students in grades seven (7) through twelve (12).

(1) Dating violence education shall include, but not be limited to, defining dating violence, recognizing dating violence warning signs and characteristics of healthy relationships. Additionally, students shall be provided with the school district's dating violence policy as provided in subsection 16-21-30(c).

(2) For the purposes of this section:

(i) "Dating violence" means a pattern of behavior where one person uses threats of, or actually uses, physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse to control his or her dating partner.

(ii) "Dating partner" means any person involved in an intimate association with another primarily characterized by the expectation of affectionate involvement whether casual, serious or long-term.

(iii) "At school" means in a classroom, on or immediately adjacent to such school premises, on a school bus or other school-related vehicle, at an official school bus stop, or at any school-sponsored activity or event whether or not it is on school grounds.

(3) To assist school districts in developing a dating violence education program, the department of education shall review and approve the grade level topics relating to dating violence and healthy relationships in the "health literacy for all students: the Rhode Island health education framework."

(4) The provisions of this section shall be amended in the health education curriculum sections of the Rhode Island rules and regulations for school health programs, R16-21-SCHO, and the Rhode Island basic education program at their next revisions.

(b) Upon written request to the school principal, a parent or legal guardian of a pupil less than eighteen (18) years of age, within a reasonable period of time after the request is made, shall be permitted to examine the dating violence education program instruction materials at the school in which his or her child is enrolled.

SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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LC01262/SUB B

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# Appendix B

## **Key Informant Interview Protocol: School Implementation of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act**

*Interviewer states to key informant:* With this interview, we hope to learn how the Lindsay Ann Burke Act is being implemented in your school. We are interested in learning about the associated facilitators of and barriers to implementation. Your answers will be combined with answers from other schools, and individual schools will not be identified. We are not interested in reporting on individual schools, but rather, we want to find out if there are some general factors that help or hinder the implementation of the Act. We will use our findings to develop recommendations that will support schools across Rhode Island in building on their existing strengths and capacity in order to implement the Act with optimal success.

If at any time you mention something that is confidential or that you want to say but you do not want typed or written down, please tell me. Thank you in advance for your help. With optimal implementation of the Act, more teens will learn about healthy relationships and will be safer from dating violence.

I.) How is your school implementing the Lindsay Ann Burke Act? Who in your school reports on compliance to the state?

A.) Please tell me about the following:

1. Does your school have a dating violence policy to address incidents of dating violence that occur at school? If so, could we please have a copy of the policy? Could you please direct us to a link to the policy if it is available online? How do you inform parents of this policy?
2. Does your school provide dating violence training to administrators, teachers, nurses, and mental health staff at the middle school and high school levels? How is this training delivered? How are new hires trained?
3. Does your school teach an age-appropriate dating violence curriculum through Health education classes every year in grades seven through twelve? If so, how is this accomplished? Could you please tell me the names of the curricula, if applicable, and which staff teach the content? Does your school evaluate student learning in this area? How does your school ensure that teachers who are responsible for teaching the content have the necessary education and training?
4. Does your school provide dating violence trainings for parents? (These trainings are “strongly recommended” but not “required” by the Act.)
5. Do you verify compliance with the Rhode Island Department of Education on an annual basis through the Annual School Health Report?

II.) Are there specific facilitators or factors that help your school implement the Act? If so, what are they?

A.) Are there specific people within your school who are champions for teaching about healthy teen dating relationships? What is their role in the school?

III.) Are there specific barriers or factors that make it difficult to implement the Act? If so, what are they?

A.) Does your school plan to address any of these challenges? If so, how?

IV.) What kinds of supports would your school find helpful to implementing the Act? (*Probe:* For example, training, technical assistance, curriculum assistance, etc.)

V.) Is there anyone else in your school or in the community who would be helpful in terms of adding an important perspective to this conversation? Could you please tell me their name and contact information?

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