

Beyond Prevention

Creating the Conditions for Student Success through
Protective Factors and PCEs

Prevention and Student Services Webinar Series
August 27, 2026

The Evolution of Prevention

- Stop viewing Prevention as “preventing problems.”
- Frame prevention as “Creating the conditions that allow student to thrive.”



What most influences whether a student thrives?

- A. Programs
- B. Curriculum
- C. Family
- D. Relationships
- E. School Climate
- F. Individual Skills



Focus on Reducing Risk

Prevention Science began by asking: “What causes problems?”



Helping Children THRIVE

What creates health, resilience, and thriving?

- Creating safe environments
- Teaching development and self-awareness
- Building connections and belonging
- Intentionally providing challenging experiences
- Increasing the skills needed for success

The Protective Factor Framework



Targeting Root Causes

School Dropout, Substance Use, Violence,
Gang Involvement, Delinquency, Suicidal
Ideation, Poor Mental Health



High Risk Factors
Low Protective Factors

Strong Well-being, Meaningful
Connections, Managed Emotions,
Academic Success, Future Goals, Growth
Mindset, Positive Self-Image



Reduced Risk Factors
Strong Protective Factors

Updated Research Highlights

Connectedness

Connectedness is one of the strongest Protective Factors we know.

- Research continues to demonstrate that school connectedness is associated with:
 - improved mental health
 - lower substance use
 - reduced violence
 - better attendance
 - stronger academic outcomes

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) Matter

Emerging PCE research:

- Positive experiences buffer adversity
- Protective experiences can coexist with adverse experiences
- One caring adult can be transformative



Resilience

Resilience lives and grows in systems, not just individuals.

- Resilience is not merely a personal trait.
- Ask: “Do student have access to environments that help resilience grow?”
- Building resilience is about providing
 - access to resources
 - positive learner experiences
 - safe learning environment
- High expectations + High Support

Paradigm Shift: From Programs to Conditions

School A

- Reactive approaches
- Many programs
- Disconnected staff
- Unclear expectations



School B

- Intentional protective factor culture
- Shared language
- Connected systems
- Consistent expectations



Understanding School Safety

Utah Code Section 53G-8-102

School Safety Pillars

Safe Physical
Space



Intentional
School Culture



Positive School
Climate



School safety is strongest when spaces are secure, systems and practices are intentional, and experiences are positive.

Key takeaway:

- Programs are important.

AND

- Protective Factors are the conditions that make programs successful.

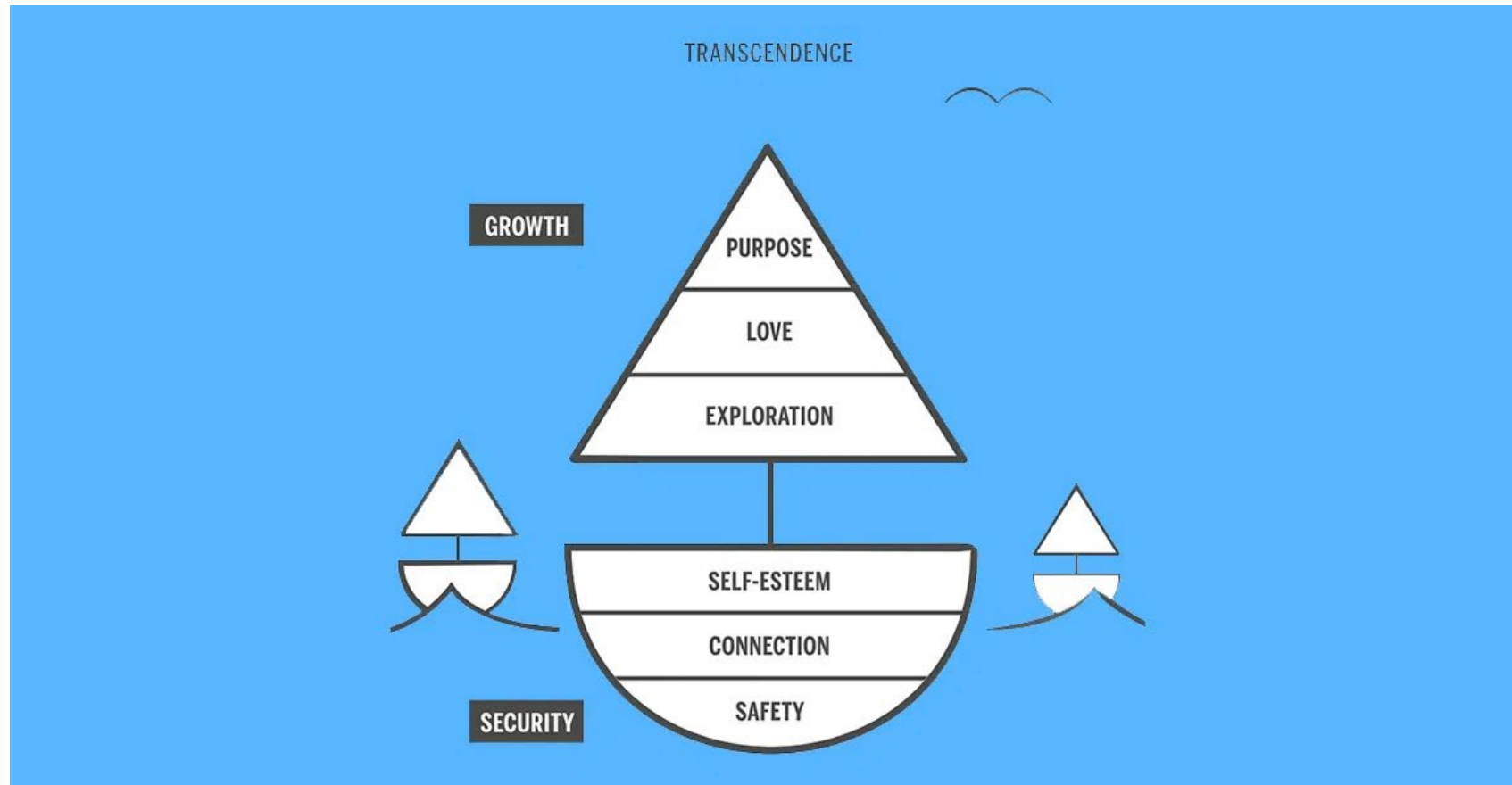
What conditions create THRIVING?



Helping Children THRIVE (2)

- Concrete Supports:
 - Proactive Support, safe environments, self advocacy
- Knowledge of Development:
 - Creating realistic expectations and trauma awareness
- Social Connections:
 - Building connectedness, supportive relationships, and belonging
- Resilience:
 - Focus on adaptive capacity through challenges
- Cognitive, Emotional, and Social Competence:
 - The skills to navigate life successfully

A New Maslow Metaphor



A New Maslow Metaphor (2)



Protective Factors Support One Another

- Do not exist independently
- Interact and build on each other
- When you focus on one, you build multiple
- Strength-based
- Strongest when used at all levels: student, staff, and system

Student Level

How are you building protective factors in students?



Examples for Students

Concrete Supports

- Food, clothing, and transportation assistance
- School-based mental health services
- Academic accommodations and supports
- Connecting students to tutoring

Knowledge of Development

- Helping students understand brain and human development
- Child Sexual Abuse and Human Trafficking Prevention
- Instruction on healthy relationships
- Self-awareness activities

Examples for Students (2)

Social Connections

- Peer mentoring programs
- Student clubs and activities
- Advisory periods
- Opportunities for collaborative learning
- Intentional relationship-building with trusted adults

Resilience

- Teaching coping and problem-solving skills
- Reflection on overcoming challenges
- Growth-oriented feedback
- Opportunities to practice perseverance
- Helping students identify personal strengths and future goals

Examples for Students (3)

Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Competence

- Life skills / Social Skills
- Conflict resolution instruction
- Self-regulation strategies
- Goal setting and decision making
- Executive functioning supports
- Teaching about emotions and stress responses
- Accountability practices

Staff Level

How are you building protective factors for the adults at school?



Examples for Staff

Concrete Supports

- Access to resources needed to perform their jobs
- Clear expectations
- Administrative support
- Time for planning and collaboration (and using the bathroom)
- Employee wellness resources

Knowledge of Development

- Professional learning on child and adolescent development
- Understanding behavior through a developmental lens
- Training on protective factors and the effects of trauma

Examples for Staff (2)

Social Connections

- Cross-team collaboration opportunities
- Mentoring for new educators
- Team-building activities
- Professional learning communities
- Structured opportunities to celebrate successes

Resilience

- Wellness supports
- Opportunities for autonomy and voice
- Psychological safety
- Strengths-based supervision
- Professional growth opportunities

Examples for Staff (3)

Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Competence

- Training on emotional regulation and conflict resolution
- Coaching conversations
- Reflective practice

Systems Level

How are your policies, practices, and culture creating protective factors?



Examples for Systems

Concrete Supports

- Clear referral pathways
- Wraparound supports
- Community partnerships
- Access to school counselors, social workers, and behavioral health services
- Resource navigation systems for families

Knowledge of Development

- Policies informed by adolescent development
- Discipline procedures that recognize developmental needs
- Regular staff training on prevention science and child development

Examples for Systems (2)

Social Connections

- School-wide advisory structures
- Family engagement systems
- Student voice committees
- Restorative practices
- Inclusive school climate initiatives

Resilience

- Policies that normalize learning from mistakes
- Tiered systems of support
- Strengths-based practices
- Continuous improvement processes

Examples for Systems (3)

Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Competence

- Skills instruction integrated throughout the school day
- Skill-building embedded in curriculum
- School-wide behavioral expectations
- Professional learning aligned to student competencies

Reflection

- Which protective factor is a strength in your school?
- Which factor needs the most attention?
- What is one action you could take within the next month?

Final Thoughts

- Protective factors create the conditions where young people can thrive.

AND

- Every interaction, relationship, policy, and program either strengthens or weakens protective factors.

Contact Information

Tanya Alborno

Prevention Coordinator

tanya.alborno@schools.utah.gov

801-538-7812



Evaluation Survey



[Evaluation QR Code](#)