School safety is a priority for the 36 schools in Mesa County Valley School District #51, located in Grand Junction on the Western Slope. District 51’s efforts to provide a safe learning environment for its middle school students have been very successful. The vast majority of the students (85%) and staff (96%) as well as parents (86%) and community (78%) believe students are learning in a safe environment. These statistics result from the surveys administered last year to all 8 middle schools participating in the initiative. The survey data will be used to develop prevention plans for each school. Using the Planning and Social Support Teams, schools continue to update and move forward with implementation of prevention strategies.

Lake County School District

West Park Elementary School, a second through third grade elementary school, is part of the Lake County School District located in Leadville, Colorado. West Park has approximately 200 students. Because of Leadville’s existing small size and close relationships, there has been active involvement in the Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools Initiative from law enforcement, the superintendent, parents, teachers, and representatives from the Victim’s Advocates, Colorado Mountain College, Parks and Recreation, and clergy. Last spring, in order to maximize efforts and communication, the SCSS Planning Team joined forces with the Accountability Team’s school climate subcommittee. This group will begin to develop the strategic plan this fall to address the top areas of concern as illustrated in the student and staff surveys that were administered last winter. Some issues to be addressed include bullying, staff development and building improvements.
District 51 is in the process of adopting a new Strategic Plan. Through this process, over 3000 school and community members were asked for input and identified “Safe Learning and Working Environment” as a priority. Included under this proposed aim is the framework of the Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools project. The district continues to update emergency response plans as well as provide training for staff and students in this area. Plans are underway for the annual crises in-service for staff.

Included this year will be a mini prevention fair showcasing exemplary and promising programs available for adoption by schools. Continuous student improvement continues to be District 51’s focus. The SCSS initiative supports this focus through offering numerous resources and technical assistance. Mesa County is happy to share its successes and challenges with others. Please contact Karol Benroth at (970) 245-9852 for more information.

One of the goals created to address the preventive aspect of school safety involves implementing a school-wide bullying prevention program and promoting respect among all students. Further, as more than half of the overall elementary student body is Hispanic there are hopes to bring in a Bilingual Coordinator to work with parents and community members to strengthen those relationships.

One of the most important pieces to successful planning with respect to the Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools Initiative is determining what has been effective. The goal for West Park this year in school safety is to put into place things that work – things which will enhance and improve the learning environment for both students and staff, making school a safe, fun, and positive place to learn. For more information about West Park Elementary, contact Kathy Bye, Principal and SCSS Coordinator, at (719) 486-6891.