

*Adapting the Focus of School-
Based Suicide Prevention to
Meet Scientific and
Community Needs*

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Overview

Invited in 2003 by Cobb County School District to evaluate gatekeeper training– State funding to SPAN-Georgia

3 Phases :

- (1) Adult gatekeeper-training (QPR).

In response to benefits and limitations:

- (2) Youth ‘Opinion Leaders’ trained and mentored to conduct peer messaging (Sources of Strength)
- (3) State GLS grant combines gatekeeper training and peer leader training

Support

**R34MH071189-01 (Wyman, Brown) NIMH
RCT of Gatekeeper Training for Suicide Prevention**

**SM57405-01 (Wyman, Brown) SAMHSA
Evaluating Success of a Gatekeeper Program in Linking Suicidal Students to Treatment**

**Supplement to SM57405-01 (Wyman, Brown) SAMHSA
Enhancing Youth and Community Engagement in Suicide Prevention**

**P20MH071897-01 (Caine) NIMH
Developing Center On Public Health and Population
Interventions For The Prevention Of Suicide**

**R01-MH40859 (Brown) NIMH NIDA CDC
Methodology for Mental Health/Substance Abuse Prevention & Early Intervention**

**SPAN-GA Developmental Support from the State of Georgia
Cobb County School District, Georgia**

School-Based Randomized Trial-Adult training

Cobb County (Ga) School District 110,000 students

Decision to train all staff in QPR

**School-level Random Assignment – immediate training or wait-list
for later training**

**System-wide crisis protocol and rapid mental health evaluations –
safe to test gatekeeper training**

NIMH funding in 2004

32 Schools (out of 35 total) 48,000 students

12 High Schools

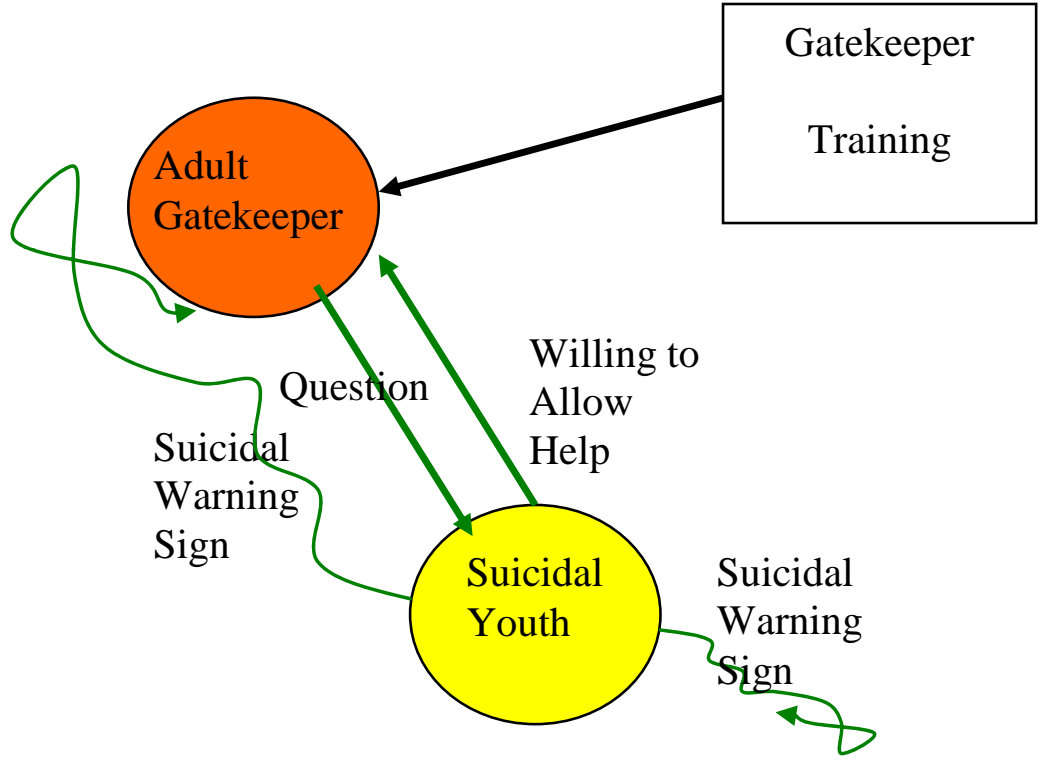
20 Middle Schools

QPR Gatekeeper training for staff - 76% trained

Refresher training for 60%; counselor training

Surveillance-Referral Model

Gatekeeper Training



QPR Training Impact on Staff

Positive training effects after 1 year on:

- Knowledge of Suicide Warning Signs
- Efficacy to intervene with suicidal students
- Perceived access to services (know services and can access to help students)
- All medium – large effects of training

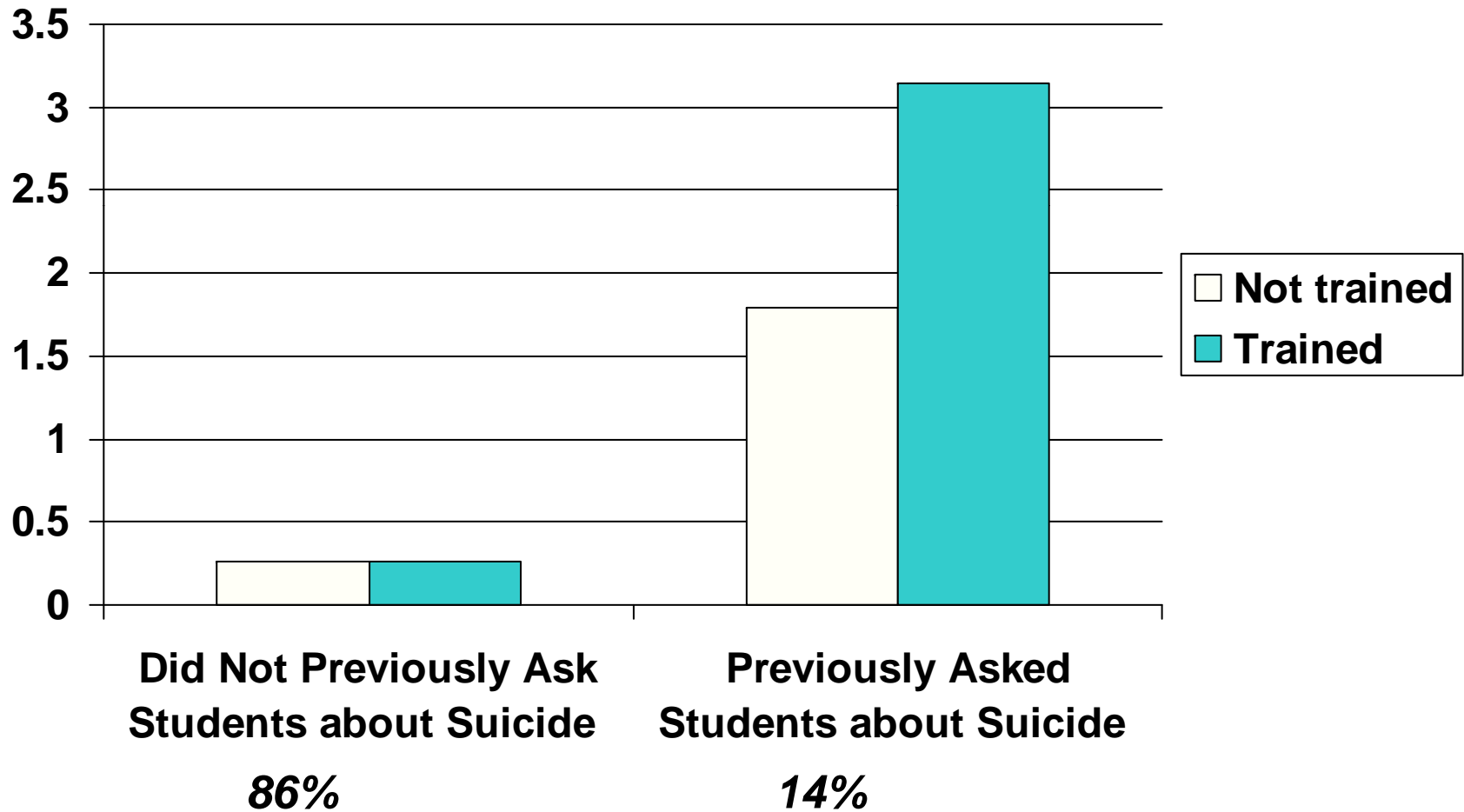
Small effect on Asking Students About Suicide –

QPR training did not increase this key intended outcome overall

Only increase for small group of staff already asking students about suicide – mostly counselors and health professionals

Wyman, Brown et al., *Jnl Consult Clin Psych*, 2008.

'Suicide Queries' increased only for staff already communicating about suicide



**2,000 students surveyed in same 32 schools:
*Suicidal students less willing
to seek help from adults***

“If overwhelmed by life ... “

‘Strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with -->	<i>Would talk to adult or counselor</i>	<i>Believe counselor could help</i>	<i>Friends want me to talk to adult</i>	<i>Family want me to talk to adult</i>
Suicide attempt n=150	18%	22%	35%	35%
None N=1,909	38%	47%	45%	53%

(1) Implications of findings for Adult Training Approach

- Adult training alone unlikely to significantly increase detection and response to many suicidal youth
- Youth at highest risk least likely to seek help from adults
- Developmental shift - older adolescents seeking help from peers

What alternative approaches needed to ‘reach’ disconnected youth at elevated risk?

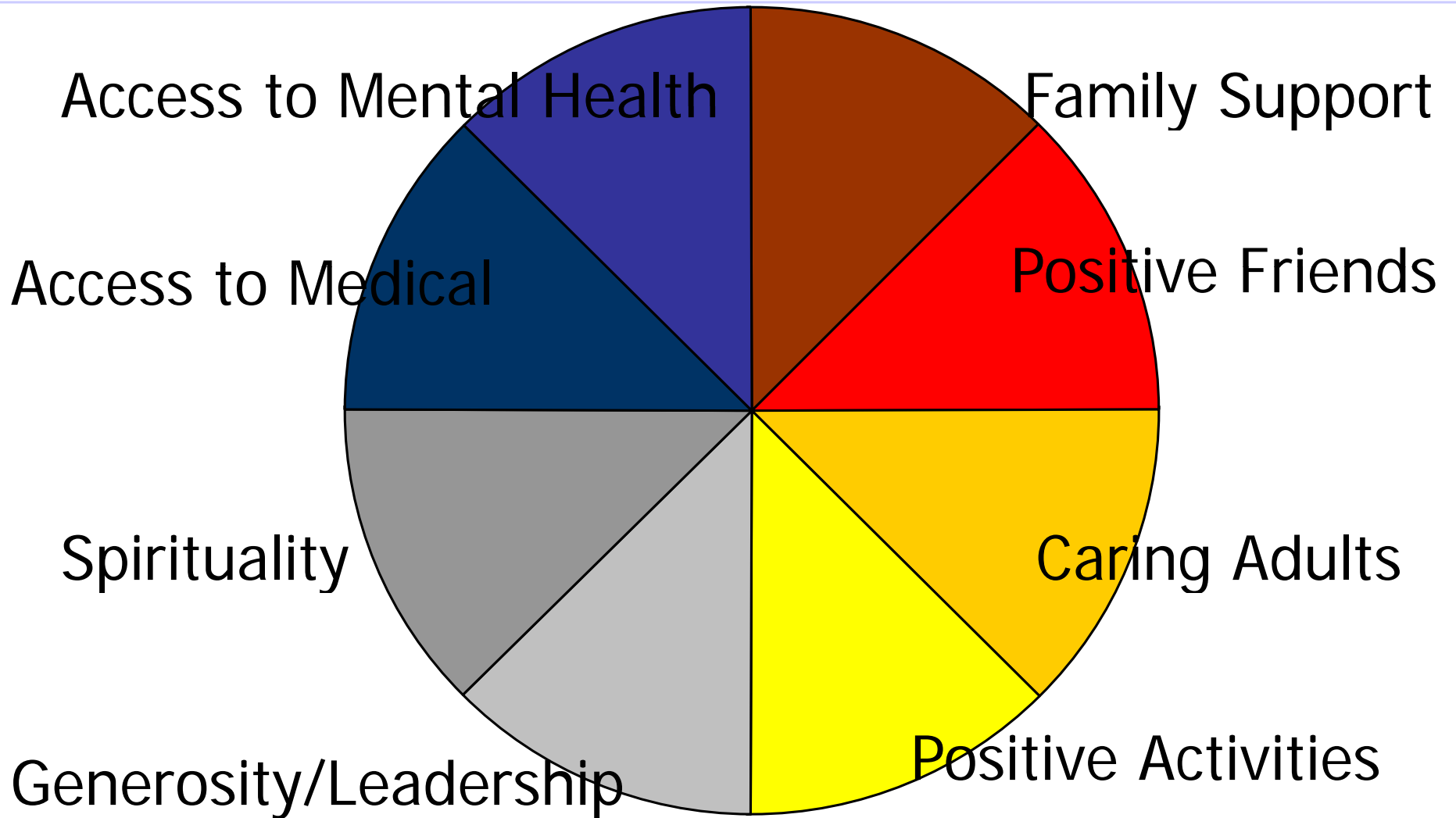
Elements to Prevent Teen Suicide in Schools?

- Reduce obstacles to teen help-seeking and communication with adults
- Promote positive norms for coping with distress
- Reduce normative acceptance of suicide
- ***Harness influence of peers to influence norms of their friends***

Sources of Strength

- National search to identify a promising peer leader intervention - Developer – Mark LoMurray, North Dakota
- 40% reduction in North Dakota youth suicide from 1990 – 2000 (5,000 trained)
- 3 Phases: engage community, train adults, train Peer Leaders
 - Increase teen help seeking norms/behaviors; awareness of trusted adults nominated by networks
 - Positive coping norms through peer messaging
 - Connect distressed, isolated youth with competent adults

Sources of Strength



Training Peer Leaders

- **Select a group of diverse teen Peer Leaders (PL) and adult advisors for training**
 - Interactive training
- **With adult mentoring teens follow with five action steps**
 - **STEP 1:** PL name and contact their trusted adults
 - **STEP 2:** PL contact 5-10 friends, which will name their trusted adults
 - **STEP 3:** Peer-to-peer classroom messages
 - **STEP 4:** PL Resilience Coping Messages
 - **STEP 5:** PL honoring, messaging to adults



As part of Action Step 2 all students at **Perry HS, NY** are naming their Trusted Adults and forming a growing circle of trust

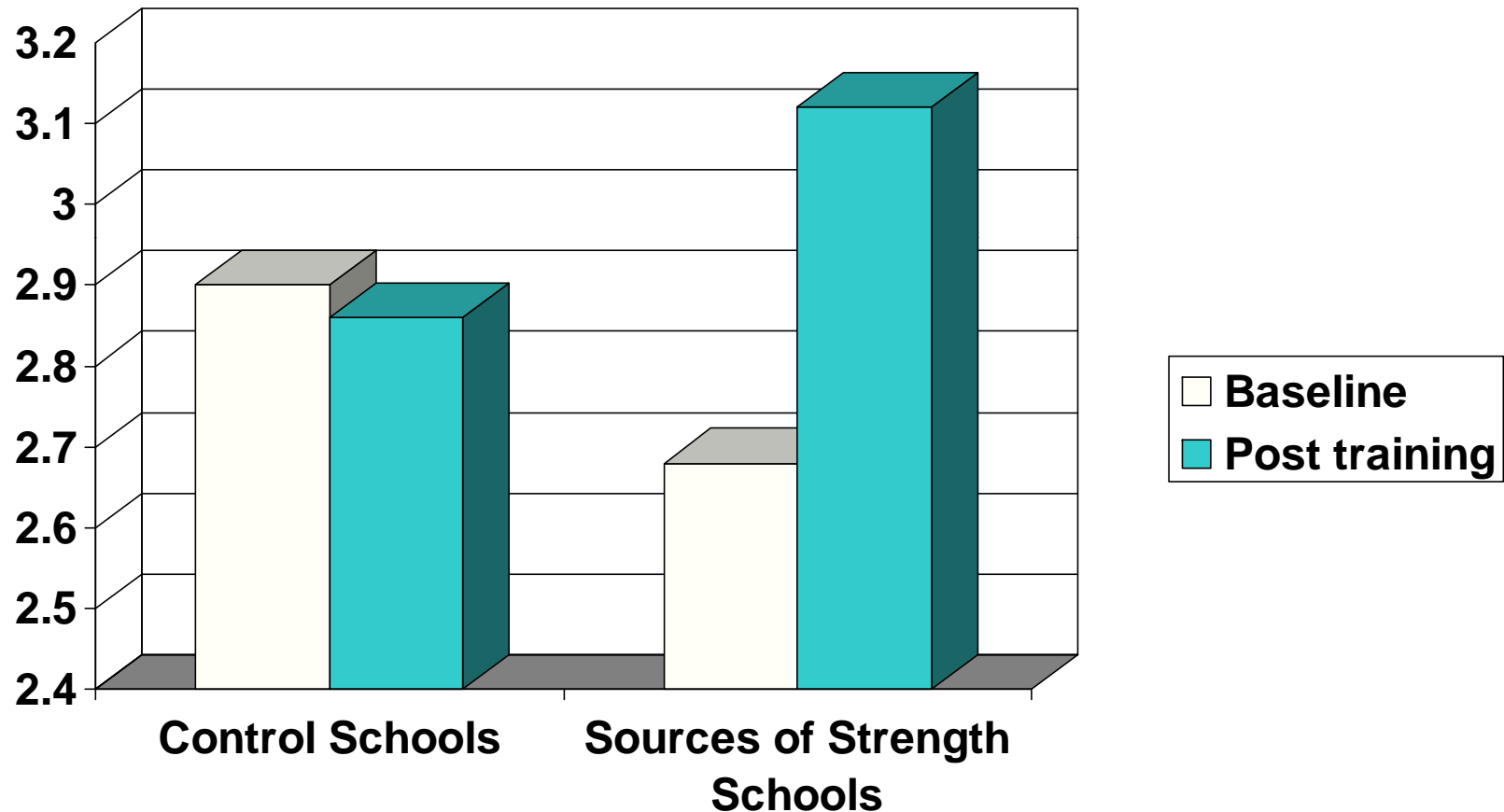
Sources of Strength in 6 High Schools (Cobb County, GA) after staff training in QPR

	Intervention (n=3)	Control (n=3)
Size (M)	2,296	2,020
# Peer Leaders (PL)	85	92
PL/Total Students (M)	1.5%	1.8%

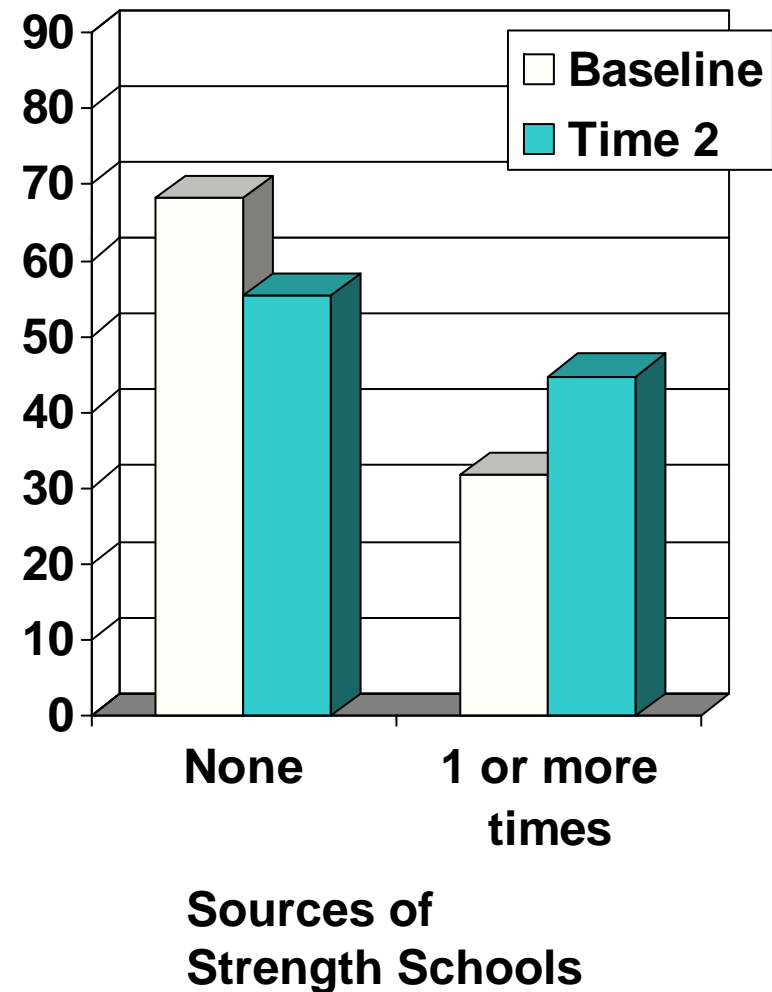
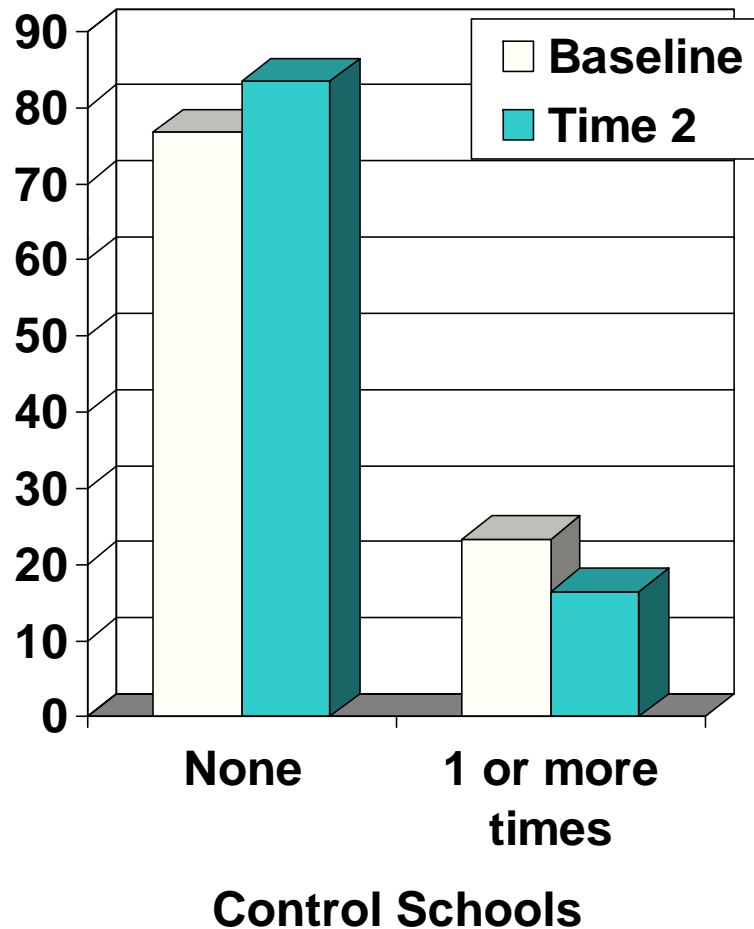
Positive Intervention Impact on Peer Leaders after 4 months

- ***Increased Youth-Adult Connectedness***
 - Help-seeking acceptance
 - Communication with adults
- ***More Adaptive Suicide Norms***
 - Reject 'codes of silence' to keep peers' suicidality secret
 - Expectation that adults in school help suicidal peers
- ***More referrals of suicidal peers to adults for help***

Help-Seeking Norms of Peer Leaders increased by training ($p < .05$)



Referred a Suicidal Peer to Adults: increase by training ($p < .05$)



Summary and future directions

1. Peer Leader training (Sources-Strength) increased student-adult communication following staff gatekeeper training
2. Building on 2 phases, Georgia applied successfully for GLSMA grant – combining staff training and peer leader training
3. Research ongoing to determine longer-term impact of peer leader training on student norms and suicidal behavior in New York, North Dakota and other states