



Case Study

School District U-46

SITUATION

Fights were breaking out across the U-46 district in Elgin, IL.

In all five high schools and even in the middle schools, physical aggression and fights were erupting—and staff were instructed to stop the violence.

Untrained at that time in how to effectively break up fights, staff were getting hurt too. By using force to break angry students apart, staff were essentially fighting violence with violence. Good intentions but unskilled interventions were resulting in injuries to both students and staff. One teacher was even assaulted with a knife.

As a result, the district was expelling an average of 40 kids a year, and workers' comp claims were frequent.

When John Heiderscheidt came on board as the district's director of school safety and culture in 2009, he knew that what the district needed was policy initiatives and staff training. John aimed to:

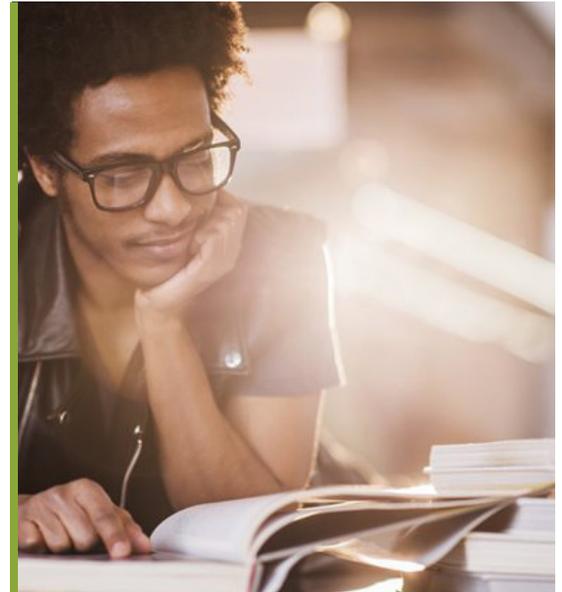
- Reduce fights and assaults
- Reduce out-of-school suspensions
- Improve school culture
- Improve staff confidence in handling fights and disruptions
- Improve staff skills in managing behaviors

SOLUTION

John was aware of CPI training from a previous position in a nearby community, where all special ed and assistant teachers were required to attend CPI training every year. He met other staff at U-46 who knew about CPI training, and he reviewed the benefits of the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® program carefully, comparing it with other training courses.

"CPI is one solution," he says, because it's "consistent, reliable, evidence based, and provides an initiative for our staff to begin using these techniques the day after training is conducted."

Equipped with data on the district's school violence and research into CPI, John introduced the idea of bringing *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® training to U-46.



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—John Heiderscheidt
Director of School Safety and Culture



The district committed, and in 2009 John became a CPI Certified Instructor. Since then, deans, social workers, paraeducators, behavior interventionists, teachers, special ed administrators, principals, and other district staff and leaders have become certified in the program.

In turn, nearly half of the district's 5,000 staff members have been trained in foundational CPI prevention and intervention concepts. John and his fellow trainers also incorporate CPI's materials on special topics such as school bus safety, trauma-informed care, setting limits, dealing with bullying, breaking up fights, and more.

Results

"In the first year of implementation, we reduced incidents of assault on staff by 90% through a strategy on how to effectively break up fights."

The strategy is simple: Remove bystanders and "call for help first; wait for your help; don't intervene alone," that was the change."

And here's the thing: Prevention and intervention is done through verbal skills and giving an angry student space by using the CPI *Supportive Stance*SM. It's done through building strong relationships with students, using respectful body language and tone of voice, and other key principles.

And while *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*[®] training includes safer, nonharmful physical interventions to be used only as a last resort, John doesn't even teach the physical interventions in his trainings.

"We focus on the lessons that are about verbals and nonverbals and the de-escalation techniques, and we do the personal safety techniques, but we don't do restraints."

In one school, Streamwood High School, all staff—general ed, special ed, teachers' assistants, people working in the hallways—are trained in CPI. Following training, "that's our school that I believe is doing the best," John says. With the most staff trained, the most community resources, and strong leadership that backs up the training, "Today they have the least amount of fights."

By teaching staff to focus on verbal rather than physical intervention, "assaults on staff have remained low. **Our out-of-school suspensions have been reduced by 75% over 5 years.** Our fights continue to decrease year after year."

And disruptive behaviors have reduced by 50-75%.

"Using CPI training has led to . . . improved student outcomes, because of an increase in direct instruction time. For instance, test scores, student grades, graduation rates, etc."

—John Heiderscheidt
Director of School Safety and Culture

50-75%
Reduction in
disruptive behaviors

90%
Reduction in staff
assaults

75%
Reduction in out-of-
school suspensions



Why it works

- **Real-life scenarios:** John and his fellow trainers emphasize the role-playing activities in CPI training. “A fight’s happening,” he says. “What do you do? Have people think about it, have people talk to their colleagues . . . and then have a group discussion.” This way, staff have the chance to apply CPI concepts to the situations they face every day. And they make action plans for handling their biggest challenges.
- **Starting from the top:** “Unless the school administration is strongly behind the effort, you will face an uphill battle,” John says. He attributes Streamwood’s success to the principal and the rest of the administrative team being fully invested, and to the dean’s assistants embracing CPI practices when working with kids every day.
- **Not doing it alone:** “We’ve done it slowly and methodically, but we haven’t done it alone. It’s been with our community partners; we’ve had agencies around us, social service agencies, youth agencies . . . integral to helping kids—small circles alternatives to school suspension programs. . . . And all these other agencies and people will have different things they can bring to it, but you have your core of how we approach situations when they happen, how we view escalations and agitations, and how we move into those situations.”
- **CPI support:** CPI offers implementation support and problem-solving by phone, through an online professional learning network, via an online Training Center, with advanced and renewal courses, with customizable training materials, through web and print resources, and in person. “Instructor Services reduces my anxiety,” John says, “provides the services I need in a pinch or even when I plan, and provides advice and resources to improve my service delivery.”

The bottom line

“CPI training has brought a great deal of stability for our 5000-person staff in dealing with agitated and escalated behavior,” John says. “Our teachers now spend less time on discipline and more time on teaching. *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® training also helps teachers feel safer, and it empowers them to act and to manage escalations. As a result, they are able to create safer and more nurturing environments, which helps students learn and achieve.”

Want to reduce assaults by 90% too?

CPI can help! Give us a call at 888.426.2184 or email info@crisisprevention.com

References [Moving Training Beyond Special Ed and Security | Unrestrained Episode 27 | TechValidate. TVID: 8E4-8D4-15F](#)
[Tech Validate. TVID: CEF-82B-680](#)



John Heiderscheidt currently serves as the director of school safety and culture for school district U-46, headquartered in Elgin, Illinois



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