

EDUCATION DAILY

The education community's independent daily news service

STUDENT SAFETY

Experts: Sex traffickers use schools as recruiting grounds

By Kim Riley

A middle school student is sold for sex by a classmate's father during a sleepover. A high school dropout offers a homeless student shelter and food in exchange for sex. A 14-year-old sells sex during his lunch period to pay his pimp. A gang member lures a troubled classmate into prostitution.

These are some of the ways that sex traffickers seek minors from America's schools, where the vulnerabilities of at-risk students, including those who have IEPs, have made them prime targets to be sexually exploited for commercial gain, national experts said recently.

"It's modern-day slavery and it is a crime," said Eve Birge, liaison on domestic human trafficking for the U.S. Education Department's Office of Safe and Healthy Students.

The commercial sexual exploitation of children, or CSEC, occurs when sex traffickers recruit them for various "work," such as prostitution, porn, or escort services. The problem has continued to escalate nationally and around the world, presenters said during a Dec. 4 webinar that had more than 1,000 registered attendees and was sponsored by OSHS, the National Center for Homeless Education, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children and Families.

In addition to ED, "almost every federal agency is involved in fighting the problem," said Birge.

Katherine Chon, senior advisor on trafficking in persons at HHS, said CSEC is one facet of the Obama administration's health and human trafficking initiative, which is part of the larger Federal Strategic Action Plan on Services to Victims of Human Trafficking in the United States. The action plan calls for coordinated, effective, culturally appropriate, and trauma-informed care for victims and survivors.

This fall, new guidance for states on child trafficking was released by ACF that provides a road map for how child welfare and runaway and homeless youth systems can identify, engage with, and serve victims and survivors of child trafficking, Chon said.

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Today's Highlights

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NATION'S REPORT CARD

TUDA results show growth among urban districts

By Emily Ann Brown

Results for the 2013 Trial Urban District Assessment showed that most districts that participated in the first TUDA reading or math assessments in 2003 scored higher at both grades 4 and 8 this year, and none of the participating districts scored lower than in the first testing year.

The District of Columbia Public Schools was highlighted as being the only district of the 21 that participated this year to show gains in both math and reading at both grades compared with 2011, according to *The Nation's Report Card: 2013 Mathematics and Reading — Trial Urban District Assessment*.

What's more, the TUDA report showed the achievement gap between the nation and big city schools has narrowed between 2003 and 2013.

Atlanta, Boston, the District of Columbia, Los Angeles and San Diego outpaced the nation's gains in average grade 4 reading scores during that time. In eighth-grade reading, Atlanta, Los Angeles and San Diego outpaced the nation's gains in the subject, the results showed.

Regarding math, data showed that average scores among students in the large cities also grew significantly on the exam in grades 4 and 8 since 2003. Specifically, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, D.C., Los Angeles and San Diego had greater score gains from 2003 to 2013 in grade 4 when compared to the nation, the report said.

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In eighth-grade math, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, D.C., Houston, Los Angeles and San Diego also outpaced the nation and made notable gains, the report said.

Indeed, testing officials also highlighted Los Angeles for improving scores in reading at both grades, and in math at grade 4.

Trend line

The 2013 TUDA results marked the 10th anniversary since the first round of reading and math scores were released in 2003.

The urban district assessment includes findings for the nation's large cities based on the combined scores of all cities in the nation with populations of 250,000 or more — including the participating districts, according to the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Scores fall on a 0-500 scale, and are divided into achievement levels described as basic, indicating partial mastery of the knowledge and skills needed at that grade; proficient, which signifies solid academic performance; and advanced, representing superior work, NAGB officials said.

The 2013 TUDA results are based on representative samples of 1,100 to 2,300 public school students at grade 4, and 900 to 2,100 public school students at grade 8 in each participating urban district.

Since the initial TUDA results, much information has been collected about the progress of large urban districts, but it wasn't until now that "we have garnered a long enough trend line to be clear about the progress urban public schools are making," said Michael Casserly, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools in presenting the results this week.

Between 2003 and 2013, the large cities have improved their fourth-grade reading performance on NAEP by 8 scale-score points and narrowed the gap between urban district schools and the nation by 32 percent, he explained.

At the eighth-grade level, reading scores on NAEP among large cities have improved 9 points since 2003, thereby narrowing the gap with the nation by 34 percent, he added.

In math, urban districts have gained 11 scale-score points in the fourth grade, and narrowed the gap with the nation by 38 percent; and at the eighth-grade level in math, these districts have gained 14 points, and narrowed the gap with the nation by 43 percent, Casserly noted.

"If you look solely at any two-year testing cycle, the results are sometimes less conclusive and they sometimes lead observers to conclude that urban schools are not making any progress," Casserly said. "But if you stand back from the individual trees, you will see a forest that is growing taller and getting stronger."

Holding their own

In addition to D.C. and L.A., Casserly praised several other cities with scores that were comparable to or above national averages in at least one subject and grade.

"Other cities held their own in the face of substantial budget cuts and the inclusion of many more children in their assessments," Casserly said.

Indeed, education stakeholders were pleased with the overall results, but urged district leaders to build on these improvements.

"Every district has its own story, but as a whole over the last 10 years all of the districts are improving," said the National Assessment Governing Board Chair David P. Driscoll. "In general, though, these scores are too low, and that should concern everyone."

For instance, even among districts that have made gains, average reading and math scores for elementary and middle school students in most TUDA districts were lower than the average scores for students in their home states and the nation, stakeholders explained.

Nevertheless, the progress made in recent administrations of TUDA are reflected in the large percentages of big-city students who have scored at or above proficient level in fourth and eighth grade reading and math compared with the nation's public school students, said the Council of the Great City Schools in a statement.



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