

**Sennett Middle School**  
**Thoughts about Gang Prevention/Intervention**  
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Gang related graffiti, symbols, hand shakes, clothing and terms of endearment are found routinely in most of our middle and high school settings. The research shows that taking a direct and consistent approach helps to create an environment that is free of stress, safe and conducive to learning. Following are a few guiding principles that should help us all navigate our way and provide students with a sense of safety and security.

1. Gang graffiti or "tagging" is a tool to mark territory and put others on notice that a group of people want to be in control. Removing graffiti within 24 hours significantly reduces its impact and deters repeat graffiti. If you see graffiti throughout the building report it immediately to the office. Administration, Security and Custodial staff will remove it ASAP.
2. If you see graffiti or gang symbols on student notebooks or on their body (i.e. hands, arms etc...) take notice and find a private time to discuss the symbols with the students. If you are uncomfortable talking directly with the student, ask for an administrator, security officer or support services staff member to intervene.
3. Student discussions around gang symbols should include the following elements:
  - A. stating what you see and that you know/suspect that the symbols are gang related;
  - B. repeating the school's perspective that these symbols are not welcomed at school because they can create an environment where people do not feel safe;
  - C. stating that you are not assuming that the student/student's family are members of or somehow affiliated with a gang, but that you are concerned that the symbols/statements/gestures may lead others to think that this is true. This type of discussion can be a powerful tool for helping kids make active decisions about how they choose to present themselves in the world.

4. If a student discloses that they are affiliated with a gang, respond in a caring, respectful and direct manner. Let the student know that they will be welcomed each day at school, but that any clothing, graffiti, hand signs/shakes or verbalizations will not be welcomed. Administration and security will be happy to check students each day to enforce this policy. This action is the key to addressing growing gang concerns within the school environment. Many students feel they have no choice and/or escape from gang affiliation. The school can provide a place of escape, sanctuary and safety. While the leaving of gang related signifiers behind when you walk through the doors of the school is a symbolic gesture, it can provide a real opportunity for a student to "belong" in a different way.
5. Encouraging involvement in after-school activities, clubs and sports is also a key to addressing gang issues within the school. Gang affiliation is really about belonging, power (personal and monetary), control and safety. Helping kids find a new way to explore these issues is extremely important.
6. Never underestimate the power of your relationship with the students you teach. Many, many kids have been saved by the caring of just one adult who is consistent and has high expectations.
7. Keep the dialogue going! Don't hesitate to ask questions, raise concerns and share ideas. Please feel free to talk with me anytime.