

APPROACHES TO SCHOOL SAFETY
IN AMERICA'S LARGEST CITIES

Prepared for the Lieutenant Governor's
Task Force on School Safety

Vera Institute of Justice

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Introduction

School safety, traditionally the province of individual schools, is now of great concern to officials at all levels of government. Not only are students, teachers, and parents affected, but tragic incidents like the one in Littleton, Colorado, make entire communities feel victimized. What can governments and communities do to prevent violent incidents and minimize the chance they will recur? In other words, what can we do to make our schools safe?

There is no panacea, but there are numerous ways of attacking the problem: security systems, such as metal detectors, video cameras, and hotlines; security personnel or police officers in the schools; violence-prevention and conflict-resolution programs; government services and nongovernmental programs for youth at risk of offending or re-offending; disciplinary measures for students who violate codes of conduct; and criminal justice responses for youth who commit crimes. Many jurisdictions are using these tools or exploring new variations or additional options.

At the same time, states, cities, and schools are trying to decide how to manage the problem of school safety. What organizational structures promote accountability and coordination between the multiple governmental agencies involved? What processes exist to identify problems, determine a response, and follow through to make sure it works? How can counties within a state or even schools within a city learn from each other's experience?

The Vera Institute of Justice prepared this report to share methods that cities and states around the country are using to ensure school safety, in the hope that New York will benefit from seeing how other jurisdictions have approached school safety. Vera studied the five largest cities in the country and the states in which these cities are located: Chicago, Illinois; Houston, Texas; Los Angeles, California; New York, New York; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In addition, Vera examined innovative programs in Austin, Texas; Boston, Massachusetts; and Charlotte, North Carolina.

Vera obtained most of the information in this report by conducting interviews with individuals from a variety of backgrounds and vantage points. We interviewed people working at the state, city, and local levels; representatives of government agencies and nonprofit organizations; educators; parents; students; academics; and members of law enforcement, mental health, and social service agencies. The interviews and site visits generated numerous governmental and nongovernmental contacts, which are listed at the end of this report. We hope they will be useful to New York State as it implements the recommendations of the Lieutenant Governor's Task Force on School Safety.

Vera's survey focused on the question of how states, cities, and schools structure their institutions to address school safety issues. We also inventoried the key strategies the five largest cities use. Specifically, we looked at security staff in the schools, security systems, reporting of school safety incidents, and school safety programs that engage parents and communities in making schools safe.

Government Structures

Many government agencies are involved in school safety, as the membership of the Lieutenant Governor's Task Force demonstrates. Of course, schools and boards of education are responsible for what goes on in school buildings. Law enforcement, correction, and probation agencies are involved when behavior becomes criminal or when an incident happens outside the school building. Sometimes, as in New York City, police departments also provide schools with safety officers or oversee school safety staff. Mental health and substance abuse agencies assist children who have mental health, behavioral, or substance abuse problems. Finally, child welfare agencies come into the mix when these students are in foster care or in abusive households.

These agencies can be more effective if they coordinate their responses. For example, children in foster care are at greater risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of violence. By coordinating with foster care agencies, which are more familiar with these children's needs and circumstances, schools can more effectively limit these students' exposure to violence. Similarly, schools may better meet children's mental health needs if they work with mental health agencies. On the other hand, dispersing accountability for school safety among multiple agencies can lead to inaction, so it can be valuable to have a single entity responsible for assuring that programs are being effectively implemented.

In examining school safety structures at the state and local levels, we discovered several possible approaches.

At the State Level

Three out of the five states we examined—Pennsylvania, California, and Texas—have a school safety office within the state department of education. Typically, these offices administer grants for school safety programs or equipment, identify and encourage replication of model programs, serve as clearinghouses for information on school safety strategies, and provide training and technical assistance to schools. California's Safe Schools and Violence Prevention Office operates a School/Law Enforcement Partnership, which has a statewide cadre of 100 specially trained professionals and technical assistance facilitators to advise schools, law enforcement organizations, youth-serving agencies, parents, and students on how to work together to improve school safety.

Another option used by New York and Texas contracts with an entity to create a school safety center for the state or part of the state. New York's education department funds the Upstate Center for School Safety; Texas has given a grant to Southwest Texas State University to establish the Texas School Safety Center, a resource for training and technical assistance.

Offices within education departments are valuable resources, and they help disseminate information statewide; however, they may not be able to force interagency collaboration. Some states achieve collaboration by creating a permanent or temporary entity drawn from multiple agencies. In Illinois, 1997 legislation created the Violence Prevention Authority,

co-chaired by the Illinois attorney general and the director of the Illinois Department of Public Health—an arrangement that ensures coordination among justice and health officials. Pennsylvania created the Governor’s Partnership for Safe Children, which brings together representatives from the Departments of Education, Health, and Welfare.

In 1999, the governors of Texas and New York created task forces on school safety that bring together officials from justice, education, health care, and other agencies with expertise in and responsibility for aspects of school safety. With leadership from the governors’ offices and focused mandates, these groups can accomplish a lot in a short time. They are temporary, however, so those states face the challenge of coordinating school safety responses in a more permanent way.

Two states, Texas and California, have achieved interagency collaboration through legislative mandates. In 1995, the Texas legislature mandated that each school district, in cooperation with its county’s juvenile board, adopt a code of student conduct and that each juvenile justice board in a district with more than 125,000 students provide an alternative-education program for students disciplined for serious infractions. In California, 1997 legislation required each school to form a school safety planning committee involving parents, teachers, school staff and law enforcement representatives to develop and implement a comprehensive safety plan tailored to its particular needs. Several people in Los Angeles reported that this process has forced the parties involved to work together on school safety issues in a way they never did before.

At the City and Local Levels

None of the cities we examined had separate government agencies devoted to school safety. Most cities have school safety offices within the Board of Education. These offices are typically responsible for overseeing the school safety staff and security systems, but do not generally plan or coordinate with other agencies. Some cities have interagency structures similar to the state structures described above. The City of Philadelphia’s Cabinet for Children and Families, with representatives from many city agencies, is the only permanent structure among the cities studied. Chicago’s mayor has an Advisory Board on School Safety and Disasters, which is focused on disaster response procedures. In 1997, the Los Angeles County Safe Schools Coalition was created in order to develop a master plan to achieve five school safety goals in five years. Students, parents, educators, and representatives from law enforcement, the media, business, and community organizations are developing methods to attain the plan’s goals within the deadline.

At the local level, Los Angeles and Philadelphia, organize their schools into clusters. A cluster typically includes one to three high schools and their feeder elementary and middle schools. These groupings can be helpful for tackling school safety problems. For high schools, the links can help administrators anticipate the arrival of challenging students; for middle schools, it can help administrators respond constructively when high school students become the source of trouble for younger children. Residents and merchants

receive more effective responses and less finger-pointing when they report incidents or raise concerns.

School Safety Strategies

Security Staff

Every city we studied used school security officers, although their precise responsibilities vary. New York City has by far the largest number of school safety agents: 3,400 agents for a student population of approximately 1.1 million. Chicago, with the next-largest force, has 600 school security officers for 431,000 students. In Houston and Los Angeles, these officers are armed and have the power of arrest; in New York, the officers are not armed but do have the power of arrest; in Philadelphia, officers are unarmed and can detain but not arrest students; and in Chicago they are unarmed and do not have the power of arrest. The effectiveness of security staff appears to depend not on their precise responsibilities, but on how fully integrated into the school structure officers are and the extent to which they have trusting relationships with students and staff.

Security Systems

The most common security system is metal detectors. They are in all schools in Los Angeles and will be in all of Chicago's high schools and middle schools by the 1999-2000 school year. They are also used in many schools in Houston, New York, and Philadelphia. Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and New York also use video surveillance in a few high schools and middle schools. Chicago and Philadelphia have telephone hotlines through which anyone can anonymously report suspicious or illegal activity in and around schools.

Los Angeles is beginning to employ state-of-the-art technology measures to enhance its ability to respond to violent and criminal activity in schools. In several schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District students entering school buildings are required to swipe a card through a machine that identifies their disciplinary status. If a student is barred from entering school grounds, an alarm will sound when the card is swiped.

But while security systems like these can reduce crime and make students feel safer, they are costly and can also make a school environment feel less nurturing. These trade-offs should be taken into consideration when security strategies are planned.

Incident Reporting

A good incident reporting system can be a valuable tool for school administrators, law enforcement officers, teachers, students, and parents. It can help school administrators and law enforcement agencies identify and address safety problems and deploy their resources to prevent dangerous incidents. It can also help parents decide where to send their children to school and enable the public to hold policy makers accountable for school safety.

Responsibility for preparing incident reports generally falls on school principals; police

departments keep track of incidents that result in arrest. Generally, end-of-year discipline reports include the total number of incidents in each of a school system's discipline categories but not the actions the schools have taken in response to such incidents. An exception is Houston, where schools are required to identify measures they are taking to reduce school violence when compiling end-of-year incident reports. The Los Angeles Unified School District Police are also currently implementing a FASTRAC system, a school crime-mapping initiative that will help school police analyze trends and respond accordingly. An in-depth discussion of the factors to be considered in formulating a disciplinary incident reporting system is described in Vera's "School Safety Incident Reporting," which accompanies this report.

Programming

There are a great many school safety programs, ranging from violence-prevention programs to community service programs for young offenders. Few of these programs have been thoroughly evaluated, and this survey does not attempt to determine which programs are effective.¹ Instead, we highlight programs that involve parents or communities in school safety or that demonstrate interagency collaboration.

For example, Boston operates several programs that emphasize cooperation among schools, police, and the community in devising strategies that stress prevention and enforcement simultaneously. One of these programs is Operation Ceasefire, which identifies youth suspected of gun ownership or gang activity and arranges meetings with them with clergy, police officers, and parents to warn them of the consequences of their actions and offer programs to address their needs. In Chicago, the Youth Outreach Workers Program operates in the 12 neighborhoods with the highest crime rates. The program trains off-duty police officers, community members, parents, and teachers to work as youth outreach workers in their home communities.

New York might benefit from examining the programs described in this report and speaking with government officials about them. In light of the dearth of thorough research on these initiatives, however, Vera recommends testing and thoroughly evaluating these and other models in the state.

Cities and states across the country have tried a range of strategies and created many government structures to address school safety. Many these approaches are promising, but there is also room for innovation. Vera hopes this survey will be useful to New York as it maps out its own approach to making schools safer.

¹ The Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence has published a compendium of school safety programs that have received positive evaluations.

Chicago, Illinois

The Chicago public school system is a single school district.

- 470 elementary schools, 25 middle schools, and 92 high schools
- 431,085 students
- 53.2% black, 33.4% Hispanic, 10% white, 3.2% Asian, 0.2% Native American
- 85% eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches

Government Structures

School Safety at the State Level

The Illinois State Board of Education is the main entity that determines statewide educational policy. In 1997, the legislature passed the Illinois Violence Prevention Act, which established a new agency, the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority. Illinois is unique in having a state agency dedicated to violence prevention. In 1999, the legislature passed the Safe to Learn Act which appropriated \$ 14 million to be distributed by the Violence Prevention authority for 1) safety and security measures, 2) violence prevention programming, 3) crisis intervention; and 4) school personnel training.

The Illinois Violence Prevention Authority is governed by a board of ten representatives from the private sector and 11 from state government. The board is co-chaired by the attorney general and the director of public health. In addition to developing a state plan for violence prevention, the agency has established areas in which to focus funding, developed three grant programs, and conducted a variety of public awareness initiatives. Although this agency was initially funded by the sale of special Illinois license plates, it currently receives an annual appropriation from the state legislature.

School Safety at the City Level

In 1995, the Illinois legislature gave the mayor of Chicago complete control over the city's public schools. Feeling that the schools were in crisis because of academic problems and increasing numbers of drop-outs, the legislature established the Reform Board of Trustees for a limited four-year term. The board, which replaced the old Board of Education, consists of seven members who are appointed by the mayor and report directly to him. It determines education policy citywide, with the goals of improving the quality of education and accountability, reducing the cost of noneducational services, streamlining school management, and developing a long-term, balanced financial plan. The board works in cooperation with the mayor's Children First Initiative, which helps underserved children by increasing collaboration among social service agencies, government offices, and local businesses.

Many public officials and community representatives believe that the 1995 restructuring of the public schools improved school safety by linking city offices with nontraditional, nongovernmental resources. For example, the Interfaith Community

Partnership, begun in 1996, is a multicultural, interfaith network of 300 religious leaders and organizations that work with local schools to address students' safety, discipline, truancy, and self-esteem. Many of these organizations provide mentors, off-site detention and community service programs, and after-school homework centers. The mayor's Advisory Board on School Safety and Disasters created an emergency volunteer network by linking the Red Cross with the police and school nurses, psychologists, and volunteer workers in the health field. School personnel have offered their medical corps to the Red Cross in a case of emergency, and the Red Cross has offered its EMT volunteers to assist in school emergencies.

In addition, the mayor's Commission on Domestic Violence supports children affected by domestic violence in their homes. When orders of protection are issued to women and children, the schools are now notified. Special programs mediated by school psychologists, nurses, and counselors have been created for these children.

In 1996, the Chicago Department of Health began to develop the Chicago Violence Prevention Strategic Plan. For 18 months, this project involved more than 150 community leaders from child care systems, schools, health agencies, substance-abuse agencies, victim service agencies, schools, the police department, and legal service organizations. Working groups examined violence-prevention plans in 13 systems, including health care, police, and schools. The committee found that only 15 percent of public school classrooms had violence-prevention programming. The committee gave its final report to the mayor in 1998, and its recommendations—which range from making greater use of community resources to keeping schools open later to improving training for school personnel—are now being implemented.

School Safety at the Local Level

The chief executive officer of the Chicago public schools reports directly to the Reform Board. Within the schools system, the departments responsible for school safety are the Bureau of Safety and Security, the Office of Specialized Services, and the Office of School and Community Relations. The Bureau of Safety and Security ensures that schools are equipped with alarms and metal detectors. It also staffs the schools with police—both civilian school safety officers and retired Chicago police officers. The Office of Specialized Services makes sure that students with special needs, such as low-income students or students with learning disabilities, have access to support services within the school system. Specialized Services also encompasses crisis intervention and violence prevention and provides teachers with conflict-resolution programming. The mission of the Office of School and Community Relations is to expand communication between schools and their local communities.

Security Staff in the Schools. The public schools employ a force of more than 600 professional security personnel, consisting of both school safety officers and police officers from the Chicago Police Department (CPD). The number of school safety officers varies, but the

CPD places two full-time police officers in each school. The CPD officers are pulled from a special division of the city's police force, the School Patrol Unit. Part of Operation Schools Are For Education (Operation SAFE), this unit is made up of 232 officers who patrol the schools during the day. If necessary, principals can hire additional safety officers or install surveillance cameras.

Other CPD officers supplement the school's security program. Rapid Response Teams, each staffed by two teams of two or three off-duty police officers, are available for schools that need additional assistance. These teams are also sent to the scene of emergencies. The Night Stalker program employs off-duty CPD officers for responses to burglar alarms and break-ins after regular school hours.

The school safety officers attend a training course conducted by the CPD in which they learn CPR/first aid and conflict-resolution techniques, as well as how to address cultural diversity and create links between schools and the communities. The officers' training also encourages them to make appropriate health and psychological referrals within the school, such as to the nurse, psychologist, or social worker, or to outside agencies.

In 1995, the CPD's School Patrol Unit developed Operation Safe Student. School safety officers observed that ninth graders were responsible for most of the disruptive behavior in high school. They felt that this misbehavior could be reduced if students had more realistic expectations about high school before they began attending it. To achieve this goal, officers give a 50-minute presentation to eighth graders in which they explain school rules and police-student relationships, emphasizing the CPD's dual role as enforcer and helper. A survey of students at two high schools who had attended the program showed they were more likely to report feeling safe in their schools than those who had not attended. They were also more likely to feel that school safety officers were approachable.

School Security Systems

Principals have discretion in determining appropriate security measures for their schools. These measures include alarm systems, special locks, metal detectors, and random metal-detector checks. Every public elementary, middle, and high school will have metal detectors by the 1999-2000 school year.

The Bureau of Safety and Security has established a hotline (535-SAFE: Schools Are For Education). Bulletins about this hotline are posted in schools, encouraging students or staff to anonymously report any gang or illegal activity in or around the schools. The bureau has also tried to enhance its relationship with parents and community members and involve them in school safety efforts by establishing the Parent Patrol Program. This program places trained parents and volunteers in neighborhoods with high levels of crime to act as deterrents to illegal activity.

The bureau has also written a booklet, *Safe Passage*, that gives parents and students information about getting to and from school safely. The booklet advises students to follow designated routes to school and use the buddy system. It identifies Safe Havens, businesses or other organizations along these routes that provide safe spots students can go to if they

feel threatened. Participating Safe Havens place stickers in their windows so that students know where they can find help from an adult.

Incident Reporting in the Schools

According to Adrian Beverly, director of discipline for the Office of Schools and Regions, responsibility for incident reporting falls on principals or vice principals. When they first start working in the district, principals and vice principals are trained to distinguish among categories in the Uniform Discipline Code, in which the Chicago public schools have delineated six categories of misconduct and the corresponding penalties. The UDC also outlines students', parents', and teachers' responsibilities and rights. In addition, the code instructs principals when to involve the police. If a crime occurs, the principal calls the police and both the police and the school district report the incident.

School Safety Programming

Involving Communities and Parents

Based on the model of the Boston Streetworkers (described on page 40), the Youth Outreach Workers Program operates in Chicago neighborhoods with the highest crime rates. Sponsored by Chicago's Offices of Specialized Services and School and Community Relations, the program trains off-duty police officers, community members, parents, and teachers to work in their home communities as youth outreach workers. Because these workers from different communities meet each other during their training, they are able to form a citywide network of support. Although the makeup of these youth outreach teams varies according to the needs of the community, they are all located in elementary and high schools, and they are all focused on reducing violence, eliminating unsafe environments, and providing positive alternatives to violent behavior.

Relying on the insider knowledge they have as residents of the community they serve, these teams of five to seven adults approach young people, referred through schools and summer programs or by word of mouth, who may need psychological or medical assistance, job counseling, or other kinds of support service. The workers, acting as mentors, talk with the adolescents about job searches and resume writing, suicide, housing, and ways to leave gangs. The program's partners are interfaith organizations, libraries, parks, neighborhood councils, local businesses, government and city agencies, and social service agencies.

Saturday Morning Alternative Reach Out and Teach, or SMART, provides first-time criminal offenders with prevention, intervention, referral, and support services for nonviolent alcohol or drug-related problems. Each student is assigned a mentor and must perform 20 hours of community service. Students who do not successfully complete the program are referred to one of six alternative "safe schools," which provide a structured curriculum and small classes, including support services determined by individual learning

plans for each student.

The Chicago Project for Violence Prevention (CPVP) is a long-term, comprehensive effort to help seven communities with high levels of violent crime develop effective violence-prevention programs. The project treats violence as an epidemic, employing a public health strategy. It is directed by an advisory board and a steering committee comprising criminal justice, health, religious, and civic leaders, as well as members of the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority. Current programs include linking former gang members with jobs and keeping high schools open in the evening.

Chicago Public Schools supports and funds a number of programs, including Parents as Teachers First and KidSTART. Parents as Teachers First targets preschoolers. Six hundred parents from 80 schools have been trained to act as parent-tutor mentors. They are paid to work with the parents of young children between the ages of three and five who are on waiting lists for early childhood development programs. Parents as Teachers First gives preschoolers academically enriched opportunities and fosters the development of socially appropriate behavior. It also receives support from the Office of Specialized Services.

Chicago Youth Programs is expanding KidSTART, an art therapy program for students who have experienced violence. The program is based at two Boys and Girls Club sites. At-risk youth work on art projects to reduce emotional pain and decrease the likelihood that they will become perpetrators or victims of violence in the future.

Operation Cease-Fire provides a highly coordinated rapid response to shootings in Chicago communities. Participants include community residents, community-based organizations, the clergy, the Chicago Police Department, and state police. When a shooting takes place, members hold a strategic response meeting within 24 hours to coordinate response tactics for the area. The program also traces all seized guns within these communities, and oversees a community hotline which citizens can call to report gun activity. Operation Cease Fire also organizes communitywide marches and rallies and other actions against gun use and trafficking.

Houston, Texas

The Houston Independent School District is composed of 13 school districts.

- 174 elementary, 34 middle, 30 high schools
- 211,197 students
- 53% Hispanic, 34% black, 11% white, 3% Asian, .1% Native American
- 73% receive free or reduced-cost lunches

Government Structures

School Safety at the State Level

The Texas State Board of Education is primarily responsible for developing statewide education policies and standards. The Safe Schools Division of the Texas Education Agency, run by the commissioner of education, is responsible for managing state school safety programs and initiatives. In 1995, the Texas Education Code, Chapter 37, was revised to mandate that the juvenile justice system and the public school system work together to help make schools safer. Chapter 37 required that each district, in cooperation with its county's juvenile board, adopt a code of student conduct.

Chapter 37 also requires each school district to provide an alternative-education program for students receiving discipline. By addressing the needs of misbehaving students, these programs also reduce misconduct and improve safety. Districts run day programs for such offenses as threatening behavior or possessing small amounts of controlled substances. The state also runs alternative schools, which are boot-camp-style programs for students who have committed more serious offenses that have brought them into the juvenile justice system.

The Task Force on School Violence Prevention, led by the attorney general and the commissioner of education, began meeting in summer 1999. The 22-member task force, made up of teachers, state senators, school superintendents, parents, and law enforcement officers from across the state, will meet three more times over the next six months to address issues of violence. One of its goals is to ensure that every school district has a crisis plan.

The Office of the Governor, Criminal Justice Division, has provided a grant to Southwest Texas State University to establish the Texas School Safety Center, an interdisciplinary resource for training and technical assistance to reduce youth violence and promote safety. Participants include school personnel, parents, security officers, social service and juvenile justice professionals, clergy, and high school students drawn from across the state. The center recently produced a video and interactive CD-ROM on school security and safety, to be distributed to every Texas school district.

The center's proposed future activities include a school safety summit, which will address issues such as ensuring school security, reducing violence, and preventing drug abuse. Also planned is the Youth Leadership Institute, which will teach high school students conflict resolution, peer mediation, anger management, and problem solving. Ten

regional training institutes will address such issues as risk assessment, security technology, victimization of staff and students, and mediation.

School Safety at the City Level

The Houston Board of Education is the official policy-making body of the Houston Independent School District. The district's Department of Student Support Services houses the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities office. Most programming for violence prevention occurs through this office.

The department distributes funds to the individual school districts, which design programs to meet students' needs. Most districtwide programming falls into five categories: counseling services, school presentations, adoption of national violence prevention programs, curricula, peer groups, and parent education training.

School Safety at the Local Level

The school district's Department of Student Support Services issues guidelines for safety programming in schools, based on the federal Department of Education's principles of effectiveness. It also promotes adoption of several national programs, recommended by both the federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention and the Department of Education, for use within the district. Its Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities office helps principals evaluate which of these programs would work best in their schools.

The recommended national programs include SOAR, Life Skills Training, and STAR. SOAR (Safety: Offering Help, Acting, Kindness, and Respect) pairs prospective teachers and at-risk students identified by teachers, counselors, and administrators. Its activities include individual mentoring, extra tutoring, summer apprenticeship opportunities, and a lecture series with minority role models. Life Skills Training works with students of different ethnicities in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. Adults and peer counselors work with students on such issues as self-management, general social skills, drug-resistance skills, assertiveness.

STAR (Straight Talk About Risks) is a course for preventing gun-related violence among pre-kindergarten through twelfth-grade students. There are four curricula (pre-K to second grade, and grades three to five, six to eight, and nine to twelve). For younger children the focus is on obeying rules, staying safe, and learning that guns are not toys. In the middle grades students explore media violence, reasons that people are violent, and methods of coping with conflict. The high school version fosters discussions on issues including handgun violence and stress.

Security Staff in the Schools. The school police officers in Houston are members of the Houston Independent School District Police Department, which is separate from the Houston Police Department (HPD). The school district police force, containing 178 officers, reports to the chief of Houston's school police. School district police officers are stationed in schools in order to establish long-term relationships with students, parents,

and administrators. Many expand their involvement with schools by coaching school sports teams.

Every middle and high school must have at least one school district officer on duty all the time; however, most schools have three. Officers are armed and have the power of arrest. The school district police department also trains an internal Prevention Control force of security guards who are unarmed and lack the power of arrest but provide support for the police in large schools. Houston Police Department officers are also involved in school policing to some extent, by stationing patrol cars at every Houston-area middle and high school while students are traveling to and from school. If schools want extra police in their neighborhood, they can contact the HPD. HPD will then assign an extra patrol car to that area.

School district police officers receive training at the Houston Police Department academy. They also receive 40 hours of school safety training. Some of this training addresses family-violence and welfare issues that are the root of many school problems. Officers learn how to recognize signs of child abuse and where to direct students for extra support. The school district police force provides additional training—in such areas as cultural diversity and self-defense for women—which officers are encouraged to attend. (In fact, advancement in the school district police force is based on both experience and training.) In addition, the Houston Independent School District will conduct training for any group that requests workshops. Officers will train community members in policing tactics, or will help a particular community establish a monitored route for students to use between school and home.

School district police have also initiated the Panda Bear Program. Officers screen and then train businesses and concerned adults who agree to provide safe havens for students traveling to and from school. Signs with the symbol of the panda bear are hung in these locations to make students aware of the participants.

School Security Systems

Approximately 11 percent of the Houston Independent School District budget is spent on security and monitoring services. Houston public schools have one of the most extensive alarm systems in the city. Every school facility, including public gymnasiums, is programmed into the burglar/fire alarm system. Not all middle or high schools are equipped with metal detectors; instead, the district relies on regular, random security sweeps. School district police do checks nearly every two weeks, picking a school as well as several room numbers out of a hat and checking people and bags. In high schools, where metal detector sweeps are conducted most often, officials confiscated 78 weapons, including four firearms, in 1997-1998. In the middle schools and elementary schools, where random metal detector searches are less common, 256 weapons, including 30 firearms, were confiscated in the 1997-1998 school year.

Some of Houston's public schools have restrictions on backpacks; many schools now require that student carry mesh bags so that the contents can be seen. Schools are also removing lockers and keeping a supply of books in the classrooms to lessen the need for book bags. Many schools are instituting a dress code—khaki pants and shirts in the schools' colors—so that police officers can easily identify outsiders and prevent gang colors from being worn.

During the 1998-1999 school year, the school district developed a hotline for students to call to report the use of weapons or other problems in their schools. The school district hopes that many of its 200,000-plus students will use this number, making their schools safer.

Incident Reporting in the Schools

Following recent legislation, if there is a written agreement to establish interagency sharing, school principals are allowed to release information from students' records to the police. When schools report their disciplinary infractions to the school district, they must include both the type of incident and the punishment that was given. (For example, the chart would show that ten out of twelve students caught fighting received in-school suspension, while the other two were sent to an alternative school.) In addition, the districts' annual reports must now state the number, rate, and type of incidents of violence, as well as information about measures to prevent and address school violence.

The rules that school district police officers and school administrators enforce are laid out in the Houston Independent Schools District Code of Student Conduct. All Texas school districts are required to develop school safety codes; an outline provided by the state spells out the appropriate punishments. The code of student conduct is divided into five categories: violation of classroom rules, administrative intervention, suspension and/or optional removal to alternative-education programs, required placement in alternative-education programs, expulsion for serious offenses.

Incidents are documented by principals or vice principals, supplemented with statements of those who were involved or were witnesses. At the beginning of every school year, principals are trained in applying the discipline code by lawyers for the school district, school administrators, and police officers.

Although principals determine whether the police become involved in an incident, the actual entry of reports is done by data specialists hired by schools and working under the direction of administrators. School reports to the Texas Education Agency are divided into 16 categories of incidents and are grouped according to elementary, middle, and high school incidents.

The 16 types of misconduct are assigned six disciplinary actions: expulsion to a juvenile justice program, expulsion to an off-campus alternative-education program, out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, placement in an alternative-education program run by another district, continuation of other district's alternative-education program. Incident categories include everything from disruptive behavior to conduct punishable as a felony.

Most of the incidents result in in-school or out-of-school suspensions. Only a handful of students are sent to juvenile justice alternative-education programs.

School Safety Programming

Involving Communities and Parents

Houston Builds Strong Communities is a collaborative community-based program that addresses issues of school violence after school hours in 12 communities throughout the city. Members include the Houston Housing Authority, the Houston Community College System, Communities in Schools, the READ Commission, the Houston Area Urban League, the Family Service Center, the YMCA, the Houston Public Library System, and many others.

The group's after-school project is geared toward children aged 9 to 15 years, who receive 45 minutes of tutoring followed by arts, sports, computer-skills, and other programming. The program generally lasts from 3 to 6 p.m. Different community organizations contribute to the afternoon activities. For example, the Houston Cultural Arts Alliance takes students out to visit museums, or the YMCA involves one after-school group in a volunteer project. The program, which is a little over a year old, is funded through the 21st Century Learning Communities grant program at the U.S. Department of Education.

Interagency Collaborations

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program covers all of Houston's schools in an effort to combat violence and alcohol and drug use. Houston receives money based on the size of its student population from a federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools grant. An advisory council drawn from the local communities helps shape the program and reviews the annual funding application.

The program provides counselors, who work with the district superintendents to tailor services to the district's needs. Counselors are also responsible for initiating prevention curricula like Second Step and Project ALERT. Second Step is a curriculum designed to insert skills-based training into existing school curricula and encourage the transfer of skills in anger management, conflict resolution, and decision making to behavior at school and at home. Age-appropriate materials are used from pre-K through middle school. The pre-K through fifth-grade versions of the Second Step program also have a six-week parent education component. The middle school program covers such issues as empathy, understanding violence, anger management, and problem solving. A randomized treatment and control study showed that physical aggression decreased from autumn to spring among students who were in Second Step, and increased among students who were in a comparison group.

Project ALERT is a curriculum in social-resistance skills for students who may be considering drug use. It consists of 11 weekly lessons in the sixth or seventh grade and three booster lessons in the seventh or eighth grade. Key components include counteracting the belief that most people use drugs and building a repertoire of skills to resist pressure to use drugs. According to its own research, Project ALERT has decreased marijuana and alcohol use among seventh graders, but effects diminish without booster lessons during the following year.

Los Angeles, California

Los Angeles Unified School District comprises 27 clusters, each of which contains one to three high schools and their feeder elementary and middle schools.

- 419 elementary, 71 middle, and 50 high schools
- 697,143 students
- 69% Hispanic, 14% black, 10% white, 7% Asian and Native American
- over 40% eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches

Government Structures

School Safety at the State Level

The California Department of Education enforces educational standards for preschool, kindergarten, elementary, and secondary schools through the state Board of Education. In 1983, the department created the Safe Schools and Violence Prevention Office, which runs several grant-giving programs on a variety of school safety issues.

One such program is the School/Law Enforcement Partnership, which encourages schools and law enforcement agencies to develop collaborative strategies that improve school attendance and promote school safety. The partnership has funded programs that address school violence and vandalism, school attendance, truancy, drop-out prevention, child abuse, drug and alcohol prevention, and parent and community education. In addition, it offers grants for conflict resolution, youth mediation, violence prevention, and school-community policing partnerships. The School/Law Enforcement Partnership has also established a statewide cadre of 100 specially trained professionals and technical assistance facilitators to advise schools, law enforcement organizations, youth-serving agencies, parents, and students.

The Safe Schools and Violence Prevention Office also runs the High-Risk Youth Education and Public Safety Program, which provides \$3.6 million for programs to school districts and county offices of education: the High-Risk First Time Offender Grant Program and the Transitioning High-Risk Youth Grant Program. These funds provide resources for developing, implementing, and evaluating strategies to provide adjudicated youth with educational and community services and supervision.

The Student Leadership Grant Program is open to all public high schools. The program supports strategies initiated and managed by students in partnership with adult facilitators, designed to achieve and maintain safe, healthy schools that are free of violence.

In 1997, the state legislature required that each school in California form a school safety planning committee to develop a “comprehensive safety plan” appropriate to its needs and resources. These committees are composed of the school principal, at least one

teacher, one parent whose child attends the school, one school employee such as a janitor or cafeteria worker, and any other members, if desired. The committees must consult with a representative from a law enforcement agency in developing their plans and, before adopting them, must hold public hearings.

The plans must assess the current level of crime on the school campus and at school-related functions, analyzing the student population in terms of race, poverty level, and language spoken. Based on this information, the planning committees must identify safe-school strategies and programs appropriate for their needs. They must also outline the school's procedures for complying with existing laws relating to school safety, such as disaster response plans, reporting of child abuse, suspension and expulsion policies, safe passages for students to and from school, discipline rules and regulations, and dress codes. The plans are revised annually. The state, through the School/Law Enforcement Partnership gives one-time grants of \$5,000 to schools each year to assist them in implementing their plans.

School Safety at the City Level

The Los Angeles County Office of Education formed the Los Angeles County Safe Schools Coalition in 1997 to create the County Master Plan on School Safety. The master plan addresses the multiple problems related to crime and violence in school or near school grounds. The coalition focused on sharing ownership, responsibility, and accountability among students, parents, educators, and representatives from law enforcement, media, government, business, and community organizations.

The master plan is a five-year blueprint that helps identify school safety needs and suggests initiatives for addressing them. It lays out five central goals: All schools and staff must have a safe teaching and learning environment. All students must have safe passage when traveling to and from school. All students must have access to positive activities before, during, and after school. Each school district must have a media relations plan and positive relations with media executives, to encourage a balanced picture of youth and schools. Finally, all schools must provide an environment in which students, teachers, administrators, and community leaders value and respect all cultural and racial backgrounds.

The Los Angeles County Safe Schools Coalition also formulated detailed action plans that help each district and school reach these five goals. For example, suggested methods of fulfilling the safe-passages goal include enlisting parent and community volunteers to monitor common routes to school and developing a handbook for school personnel on how to recruit, train, and maintain these volunteers. The master plan also lists school agencies that can provide resources or support for every goal.

School Safety at the Local Level

The Los Angeles Unified School District's seven-member school board sets policy, establishes and reviews educational programs, and makes budget decisions. For management purposes, the district's schools were reorganized into 27 clusters in 1994, each comprising one or more senior high school complexes. (A complex is defined as a high school and its feeder elementary and middle schools.) Clusters also include magnet, special education, and alternative schools.

This new structure is intended to empower students, parents, teachers, administrators, support staff, and community members to work together to operate their schools, set educational goals, and develop standards for student achievement, behavior, safety, and parent-community involvement. Appointed by the superintendent, a cluster administrator is responsible for clusterwide standards of student achievement and attendance, parent participation, evaluation of principals, and implementation of state reforms and instructional guidelines.

The school district's central office includes the Office of Operations, the Office of Intergroup Relations, the Office of Pupil Services, and the Los Angeles Unified School District Police Department. The Office of Operations ensures that state and county guidelines for the comprehensive school safety plans are incorporated into the district's school safety plan. The Office of Intergroup Relations, created in 1992 by the Board of Education, oversees the implementation of multicultural educational practices and curricula to reduce racial and ethnic tensions. The Office of Pupil Services works primarily with cluster and school staff to improve attendance and lower the drop-out rate. It also organizes efforts with the juvenile justice system and the Department of Student Health and Human Services to support youth who already exhibit violent behavior.

In 1994, the District School Safety Planning Committee was created to develop standard health and safety procedures in all schools and workplaces. In 1997, the committee worked to consolidate existing district policy into an Essential Safety Standards Checklist. The checklist is a self-examination tool that helps principals and school safety committees assess the status of their schools and bring them into compliance with policies related to school safety, crisis intervention, environmental health and safety, and diversity education. When schools are noncompliant, they must seek help from cluster administrators, who provide support toward full compliance and can organize financial or technical assistance from the central office.

Security Staff in the Schools. Since the 1950s, the Los Angeles Unified School District has supplied schools with peace officers responsible for protecting school property after regular school hours. In the late 1960s, these officers began to receive training at police academies, with an emphasis on school discipline and juvenile justice law. Today, the School Police Department, which has become a 24-hour operation, employs 307 officers and has an annual budget of \$28 million.

The district usually deploys one or two officers to every high and middle school. The

school police force has officers in vehicles within minutes of any school to provide backup; it also conducts evening, night, and weekend patrols of campuses throughout the entire school district. The officers also participate in many extracurricular activities, coaching athletic teams or working as staff in after-school programs.

The school district police officers are armed and have the power of arrest. Applicants to the police force go through an intensive interview process and then, if selected, receive regular peace officer training. Before they are assigned to schools under the guidance of training officers, they are given extra hours of instruction in how to deal most effectively with young people in school without compromising the safety of students, staff, and others either on or off campus.

The Los Angeles school district police are now implementing the FASTRAC system. Similar to the way New York City has developed a school version of COMPSTAT, Los Angeles is using FASTRAC to track and analyze crime data inside schools. Lieutenants and sergeants of the school police are responsible for identifying and analyzing trends in school crime patterns and regularly reporting them to the chief of the school police.

The school police are responsible for collecting and submitting all incident reports to the state twice a year. Once this information has been reviewed, the state makes it publicly accessible through the Internet, among other means. All school police officers on patrol have laptops that are being upgraded to connect immediately to the district's database. The goal is to establish a self-updating and centralized database as part of an effort to create a more efficient, paperless reporting system.

Chief of School Police Wes Mitchell supports the notion that safety resources that one pays for, such as sophisticated video and camera systems or swipe cards, are not necessarily the most effective ways of ensuring school safety. For him, the key is to improve accountability and keep good records so that safe school committees can identify and address safety concerns—strategies that do not have to be capital intensive.

School Security Systems

The Los Angeles Unified School District provides and maintains metal detectors, burglar and intrusion alarms, window grilles, and security doors at all secondary schools. The district's safety plan requires that all school gates and exterior doors, with the exception of the main entrance, be locked when school is in session. It also requires that graffiti be immediately removed.

Video security systems, consisting of surveillance cameras and closed-circuit televisions, are used in certain high and middle schools. Cameras are positioned in the lunchrooms, gyms, and hallways. The district also uses swipe cards, identification cards that contain information on the student's disciplinary status, in some schools. If a student is barred from entering school grounds, an alarm will sound when the card is swiped through the machine.

Incident Reporting in the Schools

The principal is responsible for notifying the school police of any offense that might warrant arrest under the Penal Code and zero tolerance regulations. If the student is a first-time offender (for non-zero-tolerance crimes), the principal has substantial leeway in deciding what disciplinary measures to take: referring the student to the school counselor, a teacher-led student discussion group, or an outside service agency; suspending the student (in or out of school); assigning community service; or recommending or requiring a transfer to one of the district's continuation schools. (In these schools, students who are not performing well in the mainstream educational system sign contracts binding them to fulfill nonmainstream requirements for grading and graduation.) Principals are required to maintain records on students whose activities warrant suspension or recommendations for expulsion and to make them available to teachers for three years after the latest incident.

The Board of Education, via the school district police and the cluster administrators, is responsible for collecting crime statistics for all of the schools within the district and forwarding them twice a year to the state Department of Education, as part of the California Safe Schools Assessment (CSSA) effort. CSSA provides an extensive training and technical assistance program to ensure that data are collected and reported consistently and accurately throughout the state. The California Department of Education is required to prepare a summary report of the CSSA data for the previous school year and submit it to the legislature by March 1.

School Safety Programming

Involving Communities and Parents

The Gang Risk Intervention Program (GRIP) is composed of parents, teachers, school administrators, nonprofit community organizations, and gang experts. The program works to reduce the probability of youth involvement in gang activities by establishing ties between youth and community organizations and committing local business and community resources for alternative activities for youth. Schools and districts with GRIP programs offer students counseling, connections to sports and cultural activities, and job training.

The Safe Passages or Safe Corridors Program is a county and district initiative that creates a safe environment for students as they travel to and from school. School district police officers identify a route that is used by a significant number of students and post adult volunteers, usually parents or community members, in strategic places along the corridor. The officers train the volunteers and equip them with walkie-talkies for efficient communication.

New York, New York

The New York City public school system is the largest school system in the country. It comprises 32 school districts spread throughout the boroughs of Manhattan, Queens, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Staten Island.

- 669 elementary, 189 middle, and 201 high schools
- 1,075,000 students
- 36.4% black, 16.5% white, 37.3% Hispanic, 9.5% Asian, 0.4% Native American
- 51% eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches

Government Structures

School Safety at the State Level

The Board of Regents of the State University of New York supervises all educational activities within the state. The 16 board members are elected by the state legislature for five-year terms. Each of the state's 12 judicial districts is represented by a board member, while four members serve at large. The Board of Regents elects a chancellor who appoints the individual Regents into standing committees and subcommittees.

The New York State Education Department funds the Upstate Center for School Safety, which provides technical assistance and training on school safety planning. The Upstate Center is funded through New York State Extended School Day funds and federal Safe and Drug-Free School monies. In addition, the Upstate Center has a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to improve data collection for drug and violence prevention.

Upon receiving a request for assistance, the Upstate Center helps schools formulate a safety team consisting of teachers, parents, administrators, and members of the community. With the assistance of a representative from the center, the team evaluates the school according to a chart outlining school safety problems, indicators of problems, and solutions. There are five areas on which the teams focus their safety assessment: First, the teams examine societal factors that may contribute to school safety problems. Second, the team studies rates of crime in the community that may cause a lesser or greater risk of violence in the schools. Third, the team assesses aspects of the school's physical environment, such as the visibility of the parking lot from the school building, the manner in which the school is dealing with high-risk students, and the staff development in place for recognizing and responding to potential conflict. Fourth, the teams look at students' family background, such as any history of physical or drug abuse, and determine whether appropriate referrals are being made. Finally, the teams examine characteristics that indicate a greater risk for violence, such as antisocial behavior, poor school performance,

and interaction with violent peer groups.

After the assessment is complete, the team develops and implements a plan to address the problems. The Upstate Center visits schools twice each year to assess their progress and provide any necessary training. During these visits, representatives from the center look for school safety strategies and programs that can be replicated elsewhere.

This fall, the State Education Department, through its Upstate Center and Wellness Centers, is holding regional training sessions on school discipline. The training is open to teachers, parents, and school administrators and will examine constructive ways of disciplining children.

The governor of New York recently formed a Task Force on School Safety to examine school safety concerns throughout the state and propose innovative and effective responses. Directed by the lieutenant governor, the task force includes the commissioner of the Division of Criminal Justice Services, the superintendent of the New York State Police, the commissioner of the Office of Children and Family Services, the commissioner of the Office of Mental Health, and the executive director of the Council on Children and Families, as well as school principals, superintendents, teachers, parent representatives, and selected public officials. Members of the task force are visiting numerous schools and violence prevention programs. The task force is also hosting public hearings around the state to solicit testimony from parents, teachers, students, school administrators, school boards, medical and mental health professionals, and state and local law enforcement agencies. The task force will present a practical plan to address violence and promote safe learning environments later this summer.

School Safety at the City Level

The policy-making body for the New York City school system is the seven-member Board of Education, which is composed of two mayoral appointees and five borough representatives, each appointed by the borough president. In addition, the board has a nonvoting student advisory member and alternate, both of whom are appointed by the board. Responsibility for the day-to-day administration of the schools is vested in the chancellor, who is selected by the board. The chancellor and his central administration establish standards and provide support services and managerial oversight for the entire school system.

The Board of Education's Division of School Safety is developing technical assistance, prevention, and safety programs for those schools currently under review by the chancellor for poor performance. The division will assess the school's performance and incident data, and conduct focus groups with student, parents, and school administrators. After each assessment is complete, the division will work with the school to develop responses to its problems, and will provide training and staff enrichment programs.

The Office of Pupil Personnel Services runs conflict-resolution and peer-mediation programs throughout the city. Each school forms a pupil personnel team coordinated by a director at the district level. These teams are responsible for, among other activities, incorporating conflict-resolution and peer-mediation programs into the school's

curriculum. Principals nominate teachers to receive conflict-resolution training, and then place them on the pupil personnel team.

Security Staff in the Schools. In 1998, management of New York City's school safety officers was transferred from the Division of School Safety to the New York City Police Department (NYPD). The NYPD employs nearly 3,400 school safety agents, who are authorized to make arrests but cannot carry weapons. There are ten to 20 school safety agents in each high school (the number is closer to 20 if the school searches for weapons with a metal detector), approximately three in each junior high school, and one in each elementary school. In addition, approximately 165 regular police officers work in 143 schools at the request of the principal.

Each of the NYPD's borough command centers has a school safety coordinator. That coordinator is a captain who organizes the borough's use of patrol resources with the Division of School Safety and conducts regular meetings with precinct commanders, school safety sergeants, precinct youth officers, district superintendents, and principals. Each police precinct also has a school safety sergeant who visits schools regularly, monitors the performance of school safety personnel, and serves as a liaison with borough school safety coordinators, principals, and district superintendents.

School Safety at the Local Level

Every school in New York City must have a school safety plan, which is reviewed and signed by the principal, the president of the Parent's Association, the United Federation of Teachers chapter chairperson, a school safety agent (who is an officer from the New York Police Department), the superintendent, and the Department of Education's Division of School Safety. School safety plans identify the procedures, chain of command, and persons to be contacted in case of an emergency. In addition, the plans must specify processes for screening visitors, regulating lunch periods, overseeing staff and student entry and exit from the building, and registering bomb threats.

School Security Systems

New York City schools have the fourth largest weapons scanning operation in the United States. Seventy schools have metal detectors or scanners (63 are permanent; seven are used randomly). Scanning normally requires nine school safety agents to oversee the metal detectors or operate hand-held scanners. There are more requests for scanning systems from principals than the Division of School Safety can accommodate. The Division of School Safety responds to requests based on the number of incidents occurring in the school.

Incident Reporting in the Schools

In the 1997-1998 school year, the Board of Education revised the system by which it

collects, categorizes, and analyzes disciplinary incidents in New York City public schools. The number of incident categories (types of incidents) was increased and divided into three levels, based on the severity of the incident. This new list of categories was based on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

Principals prepare a report within 24 hours of an incident. The original report is maintained in the school's files, and two copies are sent to the superintendent and the Board of Education's data-collection center. In the event that an incident constitutes a crime and the school safety agent must intervene to make an arrest, the school safety agent files the report. ("Crime" or "criminal incident" is defined as a felony, a misdemeanor, or any incident involving weapons, controlled substances, and gang-related activities of a criminal nature.) School safety agents must follow procedures that preserve the involvement of the schools and the Board of Education. For example, when a student is arrested, a member of the school staff can accompany the student to the police precinct. The police department compiles all school incident data.

School Safety Programming

Involving Communities and Parents

Many schools in New York City have Attendance Improvement Drop-out Prevention (AIDP) programs that provide opportunities for students to improve their attendance and academic performance. These programs target schools in impoverished districts that have high rates of referral to family court, large numbers of youth under court supervision, or high rates of suspension. AIDP programs are collaborations between community-based organizations, other nonprofit organizations, and parents. They are funded by the state.

The Council for Unity, Inc., founded in 1975 by gang members who recognized that mediation alone cannot prevent violence, provides student members with the sense of family, unity, self-esteem, and empowerment that formerly came from gang involvement. Student members, guided by adult mentors and former graduates of the Council for Unity, identify tensions in their school that could erupt into violence and develop programs to address them. In addition, they keep journals in which they discuss how they are contributing to their schools and working on their personal weaknesses. The council assesses its effect on students' lives by reading their journals and asking them questions at the end of the school year to test their attitudes. It is also working with the chief of the Division of School Safety to design a program to improve relations between students and school security agents. The council operates in 45 elementary, middle, and high schools throughout New York City.

Beacons are school-based programs that run after school, in the evenings, and on weekends. They are safe, drug-free community centers where children and families can engage in positive activities. More than 80 Beacons are located throughout the five boroughs. They are managed by community-based organizations in collaboration with

community school boards, principals, and advisory boards that include parents, teachers, school administrators, young people, church leaders, and various private and government service providers. Each Beacon offers about 300 children and adults a mix of social services and recreational, educational, and vocational activities every day. Activities for youth include sports, cultural events, career counseling, community service projects, training in conflict resolution, and teen parenting courses. Beacons are funded primarily by the New York City Department of Youth Services.

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), formed in 1985 by city schools and the New York chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility, provides a model for preventing violence in schools. School staff, parents, and other community members teach young people conflict-resolution skills, promote intercultural understanding, and suggest positive ways of dealing with conflict and differences. The program has four components: training teachers in implementation of the RCCP curriculum, introducing administrators to the concepts and skills of conflict resolution and bias awareness, training in peer mediation for selected students, and training parents to develop better ways of dealing with conflict and prejudice at home.

Interagency Collaborations

The Board of Education is working with the departments of probation and juvenile justice to help youth who have gotten in trouble successfully move from court-mandated alternative-to-detention programs to regular schools. They are training staff in the alternative-to-detention facilities and in the receiving schools to ease the transition back into a regular school and meet the children's social service needs.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The School District of Philadelphia comprises 22 clusters, each of which contains one to three high schools and their feeder elementary and middle schools.

- 180 elementary, 39 middle, and 41 high schools
- 213,000 students
- 65% black, 18% white, 11% Hispanic, 6% Asian
- 80% eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches

Government Structures

School Safety at the State Level

With 22 members, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education determines regulations and policy for basic and higher education. In 1995, the governor signed the Safe Schools Act. The act created the Center for Safe Schools, a part of the Pennsylvania Department of Education that helps schools meet their school safety obligations. The center collects and disseminates data on school safety and serves as a clearinghouse for training and technical assistance on safety issues. It also administers grants to schools that need funding for violence-prevention programs.

Another outcome of the act was the Governor's Community Partnership for Safe Children, which aims to reduce incidents of violence committed by and against children throughout Pennsylvania. The partnership brings together representatives from various government agencies, including the Departments of Education, Health, and Public Welfare. It administers grants and formulates recommendations for policy development and resource allocation and helps coordinate local, state, and federal approaches to school safety. By standardizing funding requirements, the partnership has strengthened the individual efforts of the varied parties involved in school safety by encouraging them to share more information and pool resources.

The partnership also works with the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to channel state and federal funding to agencies running proven violence-prevention programs throughout the state. The two groups strongly favor communities that are creating collaborative programs. In Philadelphia, they fund Blueprints for Violence Prevention, a multiprogram statewide initiative.

Blueprints for Violence Prevention began in 1996, with funding from the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (a nongovernmental research and technical assistance organization based at the University of Colorado). The project identifies ten "truly outstanding" programs across the country that have been evaluated for their effectiveness

and that meet four stringent criteria. They must demonstrate a strong research design and produce solid evidence that they prevent the incidence of violent or abusive behavior by participants. The programs must also have been replicated successfully in many different locations and have proven, sustained effects on the participants.

These ten programs—all of which are now being replicated in Pennsylvania—are diverse and target various populations. The Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, for instance, is a mentoring program for youth aged six to 18 from single-parent homes; the Bullying Prevention Program, for primary and secondary school children, reduces bullying and victimization; Quantum Opportunities offers educational incentives to at-risk and disadvantaged high school youth; Multisystemic Therapy takes a family systems approach to treating violent or substance-abusing juvenile offenders and their families; Life Skills Training for sixth and seventh graders emphasizes preventing drug use through training in social skills and general life skills.

Pennsylvania schools and clusters interested in trying these approaches are given realistic cost estimates, detailed assessments of the organizational capacity necessary to start and run the programs, and warnings about the obstacles that may arise during implementation. Schools and clusters apply for one of these programs by demonstrating that they have thoroughly evaluated the appropriateness and necessity of the program in their own community. Once a school or cluster completes the application, the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence arranges site visits and meetings to determine if the program is needed and can be replicated in the particular location. If the application is approved, training and technical assistance are provided for two years, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Some cost sharing does take place; for example, the cluster provides accommodations for the technical assistance providers. Clusters receive additional funds from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

School Safety at the City Level

The City of Philadelphia's Cabinet for Children and Families (commonly referred to as the mayor's cabinet) plays a large role in school safety policy. Formed in 1993, the mayor's cabinet brings together representatives from 21 city agencies that work on issues affecting children to develop and finance collaborative programs on family health and safety. The mayor's cabinet also facilitates data sharing between these agencies. In the future, it will pool the data, organize it in a standardized format, and make it easily accessible to agencies and other interested parties. It also runs several interagency programs, including the Family Centers initiative (see below), a truancy prevention program, and a school-based behavioral health service.

Within the Philadelphia school district, the primary organization responsible for school safety is its central office, which is run by the superintendent of schools and the city's nine-member Board of Education. The board oversees the Office of School Operations, which includes the Office of School Safety and the School District Police, and the Family

Resource Network, one of the district's main programming entities.

The Family Resource Network defines itself as “all the people who advocate for and provide supports to children and their families so that students can achieve in school.” The network draws on three levels of resources: community (businesses, social service agencies, colleges, advocacy groups, interfaith organizations), school (principals, volunteers, parents, teachers, teachers' unions), and school support (cluster leadership, network staff, technical assistance resources, the mayor's office). It aims to improve attendance, student health, and school safety and enhance family and community involvement. Its annual budget is \$24 million.

The Family Resource Network's staff includes nurses, school counselors, parents, and other community members. Staff members are guided by a cluster-level coordinator who helps them assess their school and cluster needs and identify available resources.

School Safety at the Local Level

Each of the city's 22 clusters must have a cluster safety plan, which is reviewed or revised annually. (A cluster is defined as a senior high school plus the elementary and middle schools from which the high school receives most of its students.) These plans prepare staff for emergencies that occur clusterwide or that overwhelm an individual school. They list all of the human resources available to a cluster, as well as detailed contact information, such as names of school safety team members and the local police precinct commander.

Every school must also have a school safety plan. The Family Resource Network trains principals to form a school safety team, the group of people responsible for developing and enacting the safety plan. The plan outlines emergency response tasks for each teacher, school police officer, and other staff. An emergency can range from a minor student injury to a campus fire. The plan also lists all the relevant telephone numbers and names of contact people, such as the fire station captain, the local police precinct commander, and the bomb-threat response unit.

According to Vernard Trent, school safety advisor for the Family Resource Network, the safety plans are not panaceas for school violence. “People don't believe an emergency situation is going to happen to them. To make up for that, we simultaneously encourage principals and all the other actors involved to focus more on prevention as opposed to intervention or post-intervention strategies.” Accordingly, all schools are required to develop a school improvement plan, which addresses achievement, attendance, and ways to fulfill these requirements. To assist in the development of these plans, the district's central office assigns each cluster a family resource coordinator. Formerly known as pupil resource coordinators, these representatives were renamed to foster a community and family-oriented approach to school safety and student well-being. The coordinator makes recommendations to the school safety staff and the cluster as they develop the safety plans, ensuring that each school and cluster submits one.

Security Staff in the Schools. Since 1993, Philadelphia has had its own School District Police

Department, which is managed by the district's Office for School Safety and is distinct from the Philadelphia Police Department. School district police officers do not have the power of arrest, but they can detain an individual until Philadelphia police officers come and make the formal arrest. All school police officers are unarmed.

The School District Police Department consists of 342 school police officers and a reserve force of 250 officers. There are plans to add sixty additional school police officers during the 1999-2000 school year. They report to the executive director of school safety and their respective school principals. As a highly visible uniformed police force, the officers are expected to deter student unrest, theft of school equipment, and vandalism.

All high schools and middle schools, and approximately fifty percent of elementary schools, are assigned school district police officers. (The number of officers assigned to a school ranges from one to ten). During school hours, they continuously patrol the areas to which they are assigned, such as hallways, restrooms, and stairwells. A separate night patrol unit of 24 officers responds to burglar alarms and other incidents when schools are closed. In addition, a task force of 22 officers is available for radio dispatch in the morning and evening, especially around high-risk schools.

The school district police officers are also involved in the development of the school safety plans. Through this process they come to know the other staff members and educate them about their role and responsibilities. According to the executive director of school safety, school district police officers are preferable to private security forces because they receive more school-specific training and have a better understanding of the school disciplinary system.

Officers receive 80 hours of training. They are instructed in the school district's structure, policy, and rules, as well as in their role as a "faculty member" whose purpose is to improve the learning environment. Training continues throughout the year to keep officers up to date on regulatory and legislative changes.

The Safe Corridors program is a district initiative that creates a safe environment for students as they travel to and from school. School district police officers identify a route that is used by a significant number of students. They post adult volunteers, usually parents or community members, in strategic places along the corridor to monitor the route. The officers train the volunteers to be their eyes and ears and equip them with walkie-talkies. To avoid turnover, schools try to pay them a small stipend.

School Security Systems

In 1997, the School District of Philadelphia began installing metal detectors in the schools; 19 high schools are now equipped with walk-through metal detectors. An alternative is also available: principals can request that the Metal Scan Team from the Office for School Safety come in and search students—without prior notice—as they enter the school grounds.

All schools have alarm systems. Video security systems are used in some high schools and middle schools. These systems consist of surveillance cameras, VCRs, and closed-circuit televisions. Cameras are positioned in the lunchrooms, gyms, and hallways. Forty-two

schools currently use this system, and installation continues at a rate of ten to 12 schools each year. The school budget allots \$19 million for both security equipment and personnel.

In 1995, the district started 299-SAFE, a 24-hour hotline operated by the school district police in partnership with the Family Resource Network. The hotline gathers information on illegal activities occurring in and around schools.

Incident Reporting in the Schools

The 1995 Safe Schools Act sets forth the reporting requirements for incidents of violence and weapons possession in schools. It also prohibits the possession of weapons and requires expulsion for those students found carrying weapons in school.

When principals learn of criminal incidents, they report them to the school district police. This can initially be done by telephone; the school district police note the incidents and are responsible for entering and coding them in official records. They code the incidents according to their most serious components; for example, robbery by a student with a knife would be coded under “weapons—cutting instrument” not under “robbery of student.” Determining these distinctions is part of school district police training. Within 48 hours, school principals submit a written account of the incident to the school district police for verification and documentation. School district police officers do not make formal arrests in the event of a crime; they detain the student until the Philadelphia police come and take the offender into custody. School district police officers do use some conflict-resolution and mediation strategies, although they cannot take any disciplinary measures themselves.

Principals base their categorization of an incident on the district’s 1998-1999 Student and Family Handbook, which outlines 13 “common sense rules” that students must obey. The 13 rules are broken into three levels of “misbehavior,” with corresponding “approved corrective action.”

School Safety Programming

Involving Communities and Parents

Family Centers, a statewide initiative, are sponsored locally by the mayor’s cabinet. Eighteen centers throughout the city (15 of which are in schools) provide an array of social services for the neighboring communities. Each center is tailored to meet the needs of its own community, but all share the same core interests: community health, school attendance, education, and neighborhood stability. Each center has an advisory board, which meets monthly to identify programs that could best serve its community. The boards are composed of parents, students, school staff, and representatives from city agencies such as the Departments of Recreation, Health, and Human Services. The selected programs are

submitted to the mayor's cabinet for approval and then funded by a mix of city, state, federal, and private money. The programs serve different populations: some target students with behavioral problems, others target students with reading difficulties, others provide after-school programs for everyone. One example of a program that runs throughout the year is Communities That Care.

Communities That Care is a violence and delinquency prevention program that provides communities with a process, as well as training, to mobilize people and resources, identify risk factors, and develop a comprehensive prevention plan. It is partially funded by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

By encouraging students to become more involved in the community, other programs help prevent violence. For instance, Communities That Care operates three centers, one in each of Philadelphia's empowerment zones, areas that the federal government has identified as being financially and socially underserved, and for which the city receives additional funds. Each center defines its interests differently. For example, one has selected academic achievement and is working on supplementing regular elementary school with extra reading tutorials.

The Attorney Mentoring Project was started by the Family Resource Network in order to increase the number of students working with mentors by five percent. Local attorneys are matched with middle school children. In addition to mentoring the students one on one, the attorneys act as advocates for the students and their families, helping them to find and use resources to which they might otherwise not have access. Similarly, the Church Mentoring Project, also started by the Family Resource Network, joins communities of faith with schools, where they formalize their community-building role by offering services ranging from basketball leagues to tutoring programs to food pantries.

Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth is funded by a mix of public and private sources. Its Campaign for Kids focuses attention on unsupervised children. The campaign has helped develop over 160 after-school programs by raising funds and recruiting volunteers. Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth has joined forces with the school district to provide one-time grants of \$5,000 to support the development or expansion of 40 after-school programs. Programs vary widely: they may cater to younger children or focus on athletic or academic endeavors; they can be located in community centers, schools, or churches.

Interagency Collaborations

The School-Based Mental Health Program is a partnership among several family centers, the Department of Health, and the Office of Mental Health. The program currently serves one cluster, but will be expanding to cover the entire district. These organizations, focusing on elementary and middle schools, link the community with a continuum of school, behavioral health, and family support services. The specialists help schools work with families to develop behavior management plans, train school staff in responses to children with behavioral problems, and find appropriate mental health and social services for

students and their families.

Safe and Sound is a nonprofit organization formed by the mayor's cabinet and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. It coordinates a number of programs, including I Can End Violence (ICE Violence), a partnership with the Philadelphia Health Management Corporation. ICE Violence is a public education campaign that promotes alternatives to violence and warns against gun violence. Safe and Sound also runs a pilot program that maps crime in and around school areas in collaboration with youth coalitions. The information collected from this study will be used to redesign certain buildings, corridors, or floor layouts and elaborate new strategies for deploying school personnel. Safe and Sound is also in the process of replicating Boston's Ten Point Coalition in the Philadelphia school district (see page 40). The coalition is a group of Christian clergy and lay leaders working to mobilize the Christian community around issues affecting youth at risk for violence, drug abuse, gang activity, and other behavior.

The creation of satellite truancy courts was a cooperative effort by the school district, the mayor's cabinet, and family court. In the past, only one judge was assigned to truancy cases, and all cases were heard at family court's central location. Both of these factors limited the number of cases heard and the number of families and students who were able to appear. By creating satellite courts, the district has lowered the intervention threshold from 50 days of unexcused absence to 25—a measure that increases the chances of reducing truancy. Furthermore, locating hearings nearer the school and community allows the student's teachers and other school staff to be more closely involved in the process

Austin, Texas

Nontraditional Education Program

Gonzalo Garza Independence High School has successfully created a safe environment in which high-risk students receive a quality education.

Austin Independent School District is the fourth largest school district in Texas. The district is divided into five areas, each with its own superintendent.

- 68 elementary, 15 middle/junior high, 11 high, and 3 magnet schools
- 76,606 students
- 43% Hispanic, 37% white, 18% black, 2% Asian
- 50% receive a free lunch

Genesis of the Program

In 1997, one of Austin's superintendents asked Vicki Baldwin, a former middle school principal, to design a high school that "broke traditional barriers." Before agreeing to head the project, Baldwin insisted on two conditions. The first was a budget substantial enough to provide students with a high-quality education. The second condition was that she be provided with facilitators who showed a true desire to work with adolescents. After five months of planning, the result was Gonzalo Garza Independence High School. Funding for the school came from part of a \$369 million school bond passed by the citizens of Austin in 1996.

Description of the Program

Gonzalo Garza Independence High School's program focuses on the needs of its 300 eleventh- and twelfth-grade students of varied racial, economic, and geographic backgrounds. According to Baldwin's statistics, the student population is 30 percent black, 40 percent Hispanic, and 30 percent white. Most students lead difficult lives outside school. Eighty percent receive a free or reduced-cost lunch. Most have used drugs or have family members involved in substance abuse. Approximately 60 of the students are parents. In addition, experience with violence is common. In the spring of 1999 three students died, one of a heroin overdose, another from suicide, and a third was murdered. In 1998, the brother of a Garza student was murdered directly outside his home. Another student was found guilty of armed robbery and faces imprisonment. Yet, according to Baldwin, the students rarely display any violent or disrespectful behavior towards any of the other

students or staff members.

Garza's philosophy is that empowering students will give them the confidence and motivation they need to succeed. From the beginning, Garza stresses that students must take responsibility for their own future. The school's mission statement reflects this message: "Gonzalo Garza Independence High School shall foster a community of empowered learners in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust where every individual is challenged to learn, grow and accomplish goals now and in the future." Building on this premise, the school's Code of Honor outlines three conditions that students must uphold: "Demonstrate personal honor and integrity at all times, choose peace over conflict, and respect ourselves and others." The honor code is the first thing taught to new students during their three-day orientation, known as Blueprints. Throughout the orientation, the students are taught the meaning of integrity and respect through a number of activities. They experience the atmosphere of respect to which they are expected to contribute.

The school does not have a student manual listing regulations and punishments that will be imposed if the rules are broken. According to Baldwin, such handbooks take a punitive approach to discipline. She feels that rather than being told what they cannot do, students should be asked to recognize what the entire school, including the staff members, will do together. Baldwin believes the honor code shows them how they can be part of making the environment pleasant and conducive to learning.

Enrollment at Garza is voluntary. Although students may receive a recommendation to attend the school, they choose to apply. Usually there is little parental involvement. There is only one formal admission criterion: students must have a minimum of ten high school credits from previous schooling. Students are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Baldwin emphasized that there is no "sorting or selecting" of applications—the students are not chosen based on their previous academic performance.

The program at Garza centers on working with the students one on one. At the beginning of the year, students meet with facilitators to develop academic or goal-setting plans tailored to their academic level and personal schedule. Projects and assignments are suited to the interests and academic capabilities of the students. Facilitators are chosen based on how strongly they demonstrate a desire to work with children.

Garza's small size allows students to customize their class schedule in accordance with their outside obligations while meeting the required 20 hours of classes per week. Students must also complete 20 hours of community service to graduate. For Garza's numerous teen mothers and working students, the customized schedule is essential.

Baldwin stresses the importance of the visual atmosphere. In her opinion, a clean environment is conducive to respect and is reassuring to students. She describes the school as being "spotlessly clean" and open and bright, with plants everywhere and upholstered chairs in many rooms. The school is also equipped with state-of-the-art technology. Each classroom has six computers as well as a printer and a scanner. Baldwin wanted to give her students the best so they have confidence in themselves, with the knowledge that people care about them.

Garza offers a range of programs that offer assistance to students, and other programs that help develop and encourage healthy, nonviolent attitudes. An optional self-help course teaches relaxation techniques and emotional literacy. A drug-prevention counselor and a number of other guidance counselors are available. Teenage mothers also have a number of resources, including a free day-care center in the school, mandatory parenting seminars, and outreach counselors who remain in contact with mothers throughout their pregnancy. According to Baldwin, there is a very high return rate for teen mothers.

Results of the Program

According to Baldwin, there have been no incidents of vandalism, weapons possession, bomb threats, or fighting at Garza since it opened its doors last year. There have been fewer than ten occasions when students were given a removal hearing for the possession of drugs or attending school under the influence of an illegal substance. The school has no security measures such as metal detectors or a campus police force because, as Baldwin says, there have never been any incidents that would necessitate the implementation of such measures.

Students and facilitators also have excellent relations. Students who were disrespectful or had trouble interacting with teachers in other schools have no trouble working with facilitators at Garza; there are rarely any difficulties. There have only been three or four situations that have necessitated a conference on difficulties between a student and a facilitator.

Baldwin has received positive feedback for the work the school is doing. Beth Sears, a student currently enrolled at the school, says Garza “pretty much saved me.” In May 1998, delegates from the U.S. Department of Education visited the school and commended its success.

In spring of 1999, 119 students graduated from Garza. There are currently 100 students on a waiting list to enter the school. If fiscal conditions permit, Baldwin plans an expansion.

Boston, Massachusetts

Community-Oriented Law Enforcement

Boston has an innovative and cooperative approach to safety involving schools, police, and the community.

Boston Public Schools comprise ten clusters, each of which contains two or three high schools and their feeder elementary schools.

- 78 elementary, 23 middle, and 21 high schools
- 63,000 students
- 49% black, 26% Hispanic, 15% white, 9% Asian
- 71% receive free or reduced-cost lunches

Genesis of the Strategy

In 1994, Boston began developing a strategy to combat increasing rates of gang-related violence and juvenile crime. Using a problem-solving approach, a coalition of federal, state, and local government agencies, nonprofit community service organizations, businesses, religious leaders, parents, and other residents developed several programs that stressed a neighborhood and community policing strategy to combat youth violence. The programs emphasize cooperation among schools, police, and the community in devising strategies that stress prevention and enforcement simultaneously.

The Youth Violence Strike Force is one of Boston's primary youth crime-prevention and enforcement strategies. The Strike Force is made up of 45 full-time Boston police officers, as well as officials from the Massachusetts Department of Probation, the FBI, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the Department of Youth Services, the Boston Public School Police, and other agencies. The Strike Force works with school police, faculty, and the community on prevention and enforcement. It investigates youth violence and gang activity, arrests those responsible (pinpointing instigators of violence rather than all gang members), and breaks up loitering and other activities that could potentially erupt into violence. Though the Boston Public School Police are an independent entity run by the school district's chief operating officer, they work closely with the Strike Force through an intermediary Boston police officer.

The Strike Force has given birth to innovative programs stressing communication and cooperation among local government, schools, courts, and law enforcement, as well as community and business leaders. In some instances, a program is created and facilitated jointly by the Strike Force and another government agency.

Description of the Strategy

Operation Ceasefire

Operation Ceasefire is a citywide strategy established in 1996 to deter youth firearm-related violence. The program was conceived and developed with the U.S. Attorney, the Massachusetts Department of Probation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the FBI, the Department of Youth Services, and the Suffolk County District Attorney, as well as schools, clergy, and community-based gang-prevention youth groups. The program responds swiftly to the first signs of gun ownership or gang activity by a youth. Such signs are often present first in the school, where peer pressure is strong. Operation Ceasefire works closely with school police, who help identify students who may be carrying a weapon or who are prone to fighting or bullying.

When potentially violent students are identified, police officers from Operation Ceasefire, clergy, and parents organize meetings with them. They attempt to make the offenders aware of the legal measures that may be taken as a result of gun possession or gun-related violence. As part of the program's philosophy of prevention, the students are also informed of alternative middle or high schools, institutions that may be better suited to their needs. Community and church leaders can also offer the students after-school jobs in exchange for their commitment to reject gang membership. Students are told that because of the cooperation among school, probation, and police authorities, their behavior will be under scrutiny in and out of school.

Operation Night Light

Operation Night Light is based on the concept that violent youth should receive individualized attention from disciplinary authorities. The program, started in 1992, is run cooperatively by the probation department and the Youth Violence Strike Force. Probation officers, more aware of the personal history of a young offender, ride the beat with Strike Force officers in an unmarked car and make unannounced visits to students' homes between 7 p.m. and midnight. The visits help students understand the need to comply with probation rules at all hours, not just during the school day.

Schools play a part in this process by advising probation or Strike Force officers when an unannounced home visit might be necessary. If a student is acting out in school, or showing outward signs of gang activity, teachers and administrators are urged to make such reports.

Tuancy Prevention

Both the Youth Violence Strike Force and school officials noticed that the first sign of a juvenile's decline into violent behavior and crime was poor attendance in school. In 1996-1997 school year, 35 percent of Boston public school children missed 16 or more days of school. For older students, absence from school often accompanied violent behavior or gang membership. Observers concluded that fighting truancy would not only foster a more educated population but also allow young people's behavior to be scrutinized more closely.

With this in mind, a committee comprised of members of the police, the Department of Youth Services, the school police, the clergy, and other groups developed a plan to combat truancy. It started with a 50 percent increase in the number of truancy officers and increased attention to the issue of attendance by other agencies. The program's structure includes coordinated truancy sweeps and interagency attendance review panels to work with parents of students whose attendance is problematic. Again, cooperation among the school, community, police, and governmental agencies is stressed.

The Ten Point Coalition

The Ten Point Coalition is an alliance of inner-city church leaders from underprivileged African American neighborhoods. The coalition, founded in 1992 to combat gang violence, works closely with the Youth Violence Strike Force and schools to give gang members incentives for going straight, such as eligibility for a sports league. The members of the group also help the school district by identifying and reporting truant students, and act as positive role models. They form close relationships with the students, supporting their academic, behavioral, and emotional well-being. The Ten Point Coalition also runs an after-school program and offers tutoring for troubled students.

The Streetworkers

Formed by the city of Boston, the Streetworkers work closely with gang members to mediate disputes in school and the community. Based in city-run community centers and in middle and high schools, the Streetworkers also help gang members and their families gain access to social services. The staff is predominately composed of college graduates.

At any given time, the Streetworkers counsel as many as 50 troubled students, who are designated by their principals as needing individual attention. These counselors are distributed in male-female pairs among four targeted high schools around the city. They mentor students and work closely with them to develop nonviolent anger-management skills. Streetworkers work closely with teachers and principals in tracking the everyday behavior of their students.

Results of the Strategy

Many police officers and school safety officials attribute Boston's 60 percent decrease in the incidence of juvenile homicide since 1993 to the cooperative, community-based philosophy of programs such as the Youth Violence Strike Force. Boston public schools have seen a 15 percent decrease in the number of violent crimes in the last five years (including a 20 percent drop in the 1995-1996 school year). In that same period, there has been a 10 percent decrease in the number of weapons carried on school property and a 10 percent decrease in incidents of threats and injuries on school property.

Charlotte, North Carolina

Student Problem Solving

Students in Charlotte use a problem-solving approach to address school safety concerns. Charlotte Mecklenburg School District is the twenty-fifth largest school system in the United States, with 137 campuses.

- 85 elementary, 28 middle, 14 high, and 11 special program schools
- 98,542 students
- 50% white, 42% black, 4% Asian, 3% Hispanic, less than 1% Native American, less than 1% multiracial

Genesis of the Program

The student problem-solving method was developed in 1993 by Dr. Dennis Kenney of the Police Executive Research Forum and Dr. Steuart Watson of Mississippi State University. Looking for ways to prevent violence in the school district, the captain of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg police department contacted Kenney. Soon thereafter, with the approval of the district superintendent, Kenney and Watson implemented the problem-solving program in West Mecklenburg High School. A second school in the district was chosen to serve as a control for the research. The project was funded by a grant from the National Institute of Justice.

The student problem-solving method is an approach to reducing violence and fear that encourages students, with their teachers' supervision, to actively create a safe school environment. Students assess their school's problems in a guided, academic program. The problem-solving method is woven into the school's curriculum; for example, it may be part of history or social studies lessons. Participants are taught the problem-solving model in the classroom, and with the mentoring of teachers they devise, carry out, and assess a problem-solving strategy. Rather than tackling vast problems such as drug use or gang violence, students identify a number of discrete issues that they deem important. The outcome is a general reduction in the rates of violence and the level of fear among the school population.

Description of the Program

The Charlotte School Safety Program is based on a problem-solving method known as SARA (scanning, analysis, response, and assessment). During the scanning step, groups of

four to six students discuss the problems they identify as most pressing. Generally, the students identified small problems such as fights in the lunchroom or the parking lot as warranting the most attention, as opposed to gang fights or the possession of weapons. Students develop a goal for each problem, which describes what they would expect a problem-solving strategy to achieve. During the analysis stage, students closely examine the problems they identified and collaboratively develop possible solutions. After a solution is chosen, students outline the steps to tackling the problem, and then implement them. They are encouraged to use any outside resources they need—such as faculty, police, students, or the community—to properly carry out the strategy. Afterwards, students assess the results of the plan by collecting data and comparing it with previous data for this problem.

Teachers play a large, but clearly defined, role in the process because they teach the skills necessary for problem solving. In class sizes of 15 to 25, students are taught the components of the problem-solving method, as well as leadership skills. One of the main goals of the project is to let students take full responsibility for improving their school's environment. Teachers explain that they are there as mentors and offer support, but do not give the project direction or make major decisions. Because of this philosophy, teachers do not reject proposed solutions, even if they consider them apt to fail.

The role of police officers in the program is minimal. In North Carolina, most schools are assigned a school resource officer, who answers questions about the school's safety and security systems. Throughout the program at West Mecklenburg, school resource officers attended the problem-solving classes and were available if students had questions concerning the analysis or implementation of a problem-solving strategy.

Example of a Student Problem-Solving Strategy

In West Mecklenburg High School, students identified the cafeteria at lunchtime as one of the main sources of fear on campus. While analyzing the problem, students determined that difficulties arose when approximately 1,000 students attempted to eat lunch at the same time. Fights would occur when students rushed ahead of each other trying to get pizza before it ran out. After brainstorming, the students proposed a number of solutions, which included a system of organizing the food line to prevent pushing and cutting in line.

Once they had tested the solution, the students found that the reorganization of the cafeteria line had no positive effect. Returning to the earlier stages of the problem-solving method, they devised a second solution. They decided that a more effective approach would be to attack the true root of the problem: lack of pizza. Students then went to the manager of the cafeteria and requested that more pizza be made available during lunch. During the assessment of the new solution, students found that the number of fights in the lunchroom was drastically reduced. This example shows that an important part of the learning process for the students is making mistakes. Errors force a closer examination of the problem and a more directed solution.

Results of the Program

Kenney and Watson reported the following statistics in the July 1999 National Institute of Justice *Research in Brief* one year after the start of the student problem-solving program at West-Mecklenburg High School. The problem-solving method has since been implemented in six other high schools.

- There was 40% reduction in the number of students afraid of being hurt in school.
- At the start of the project, 51% of the students claimed to have seen a student threaten a teacher. At the end of the project, the number decreased by one-third to about 34%.
- One in five students admitted to having been in a fight during the school year prior to the start of the program. After its implementation, only one in ten students reported being involved in a fight.
- The number of disciplinary procedures imposed was reduced by 23%.
- At the beginning of the project, 22% of the faculty said that half of their class time was devoted to handling disruptive students. By the end of the project, only 11% of the teachers spent half of the class dealing with unruly students.
- At the beginning of the project, 29% of teachers claimed that vandalism and theft were problems. At the end of the project, only 12% felt the same way.

According to Kenney, one of the most important aspects of the program is its emphasis on power sharing. Teachers must be willing to act only as mentors to the students. They must empower the students with the responsibility of identifying the problems they feel are most pertinent and actively implementing their own solutions.

Within this program, tackling large problems is not necessary, nor is it conducive to success. Students identify discrete problems with practical solutions. Reducing the occurrence of smaller problems helps lessen the atmosphere of violence in school. This method also teaches students how to deal with conflict in general, giving them skills they can apply to other situations.

When asked if the program could be implemented without similar funds, Kenney responded that it requires little funding. A school merely needs students who are willing to participate and teachers who agree to support them. He also noted that a school police force is not necessary for the program to work.

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