ADDRESSING SCHOOL ISSUES THROUGH THE USE OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

Article

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Historically, the police role in America has been to enforce laws and maintain public peace and order. Similarly, schools were charged with the education of children. In the past three decades, though, these roles have changed. Violence on campuses across the country has generated a sense of fear and apprehension in schools. Educators and law enforcement professionals have engaged a process to redefine the role of the police officer to include safety in classrooms and school playgrounds. At a time of diminishing budget resources and emerging threats of terrorism, the police are also faced with expanding their sphere of influence to address concerns of violence on campuses. Those charged with teaching youth also face a daunting task as they struggle with the issue of violence in their schools.

The vision of the idyllic classroom, one where students eagerly answer questions and willingly absorb the learning presented, is but an icon of the distant past. Today's schools must wrestle with an increasingly diverse student body. Teachers often spend more time supervising inappropriate student behavior than teaching. In the country today, the greatest threat to the lives of children and adolescents is not disease, starvation or abandonment, but the reality of ever-present violence.[1]T Although the rate of criminal victimization in schools has decreased since 1992,[2] the level of fear continues to rise with the spate of school shootings perpetrated by youth as young as eleven. The need for educators and police to collaborate on possible solutions to this malaise is clear. What is not so clear is the means by which a sense of stability and safety to campuses can be restored.

A survey conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics revealed nearly half of all high schools students have access to firearms and more than one in five male students

claimed to have taken a gun to school at least once during the past year.[3] Since the mid-1990s, school violence has received more public attention than ever before, largely due to several significant incidents:

- February 2, 1996 a 14-year-old boy wearing a trench coat walks into algebra class with a hunting rifle opens fire, killing the teacher and two students in Moses Lake, Washington.
- February 19, 1997 a 16-year-old student opens fire with a shotgun in a common area on a Bethel, Alaska high school killing the principal and a student.
- October 1, 1997 a 16-year-old outcast in Pearl, Mississippi kills his mother, then walks to Pearl High School, where he shoots nine students.
- December 1, 1997 a 14-year-old student kills three students as they take part in a prayer circle in the hallway of Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky.
- March 24, 1998 two boys ages 11 and 13 open fire as students are evacuated during a fire drill. Four girls and a teacher are shot to death, with ten others wounded.
- April 24, 1998 a 14-year-old student kills a science teacher during a graduation dance in Edinboro, Pennsylvania.
- April 28, 1998 a 14 year-old boy kills two teenage boys as they play basketball after school in Pomona, California.
- May 19, 1998 an 18-year-old honor student opens fire in a Lincoln County High School parking lot killing a classmate who was dating his ex-girlfriend.

- May 21, 1998 a 15-year-old is accidentally shot in a suburban Houston high school when a gun in the backpack of a 17-year old classmate goes off in biology class.
- May 21, 1998 a 15-year-old boy in Onalaska, Washington orders his girlfriend off the school bus and takes her to his home, where he shoots himself in the head.
- May 21, 1998 a 15-year-old boy in Springfield, Oregon expelled the previous day opens fire in the school cafeteria killing two students. Police later discovered his parents had been shot to death at home earlier the same day.
- April 20, 1999 at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, two students wearing black trench coats open fire, injuring twenty students, fifteen fatally, before killing themselves.
- May 20, 1999 at Heritage High School in Conyers, Georgia, a student opens fire and injures 6 classmates.
- March 5, 2001 at Santana High School in California, a student brought a gun to school killing two students and wounding thirteen more.[4]

Because of these incidents, and the attendant fear created in the minds of students and teachers, it is difficult for schools to provide a positive learning environment.[5] In 1982, California voters added a safe schools provision to the California Constitution stating that all students and staff of primary, elementary, junior high and senior high schools have the inalienable right to attend campuses that are safe, secure and peaceful.[6] According to a joint report by the U. S. Departments of Education and Justice, the vast majority of America's schools are safe places.[7] Even a few incidents of violence in

schools, though, are unacceptable as they can negatively impact the learning environment in all schools.

During the early 1980s, many experts involved in the study and treatment of youth violence were convinced nothing could be done to stop it from occurring. Arrests of youths for serious violent offenses surged by seventy percent during a ten-year period between 1983 and 1993.[8] Most alarmingly, the number of homicides committed by youth nearly tripled during this decade.[9]

Other issues such as drug and alcohol usage, truancy, gang activity, bias-motivated crimes, and children being raised by single parent households are contributors that increase the challenges faced by educators and law enforcement. A study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reported that 1.1 million children 12-17 years old have problems with drugs and alcohol, and only about 122,000 of them received treatment in 2000.[10] Gangs are also very prevalent in schools. Thirty-seven percent of students in a 1995 School Crime Supplements (SCS) to the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS) reported gang activity in their schools.[11] Additionally, according to a report on violence against women, many of today's children are raised in environments where domestic violence, drug and alcohol dependency, or child abuse and neglect are prevalent in their homes.[12] Children who are exposed to these conditions are shown to demonstrate increased anxiety, depression, anger, and self-esteem problems compared to children who are not.[13]

Strategic planning is a structured process of bringing anticipations of the future into decisions of today. It helps organizations develop a vision for the future and a pathway to get there. It involves objectivity and subjectivity while allowing room for

creativity. The purpose is to help attain desired outcomes through proper preparation and anticipation of potential obstacles. The process will set a framework for advancement, strategy for allocation of resources, enhance internal coordination, and establish accountability. This article will define strategies for a large urban law enforcement agency in developing its future role of School Resource Officers by 2007.

The City of Sacramento is known for many things beyond being the capital of California. Incorporated in 1849, it is known for the discovery of gold by Captain John Sutter and is known as the central valley of California. The area is rich in history and sits in the confluence of two rivers and serves as a community to live, learn, work, and play.[14] The city encompasses ninety-eight square miles and has a diverse population of 407,000 people. The ethnic composition of the city is about 48.3 percent White, 16.6 percent Asian, 15.5 percent African American, 1.3 percent American Indian/Alaska Native, .9 percent Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 11 percent Other, and 6.4 percent of 2 or more races.[15] It has a mayor/city council form of government and is known for its liberal views. The city is administered by a city manager who is appointed by a majority of the city council. The city is divided into eight council districts, each with an elected representative.

The Sacramento Police Department has about eleven hundred employees who provide services to the community. The chief of police, who is appointed by the city manager, leads the department. The department is organized into four offices, each headed by a deputy chief of police with the exception of the Office of the Chief, which is led by a captain. The annual budget of the department is 90 million dollars.
The department has been recognized as a leader in the area of community oriented policing throughout the world. It manages one of three Regional Community Policing

Institutes (RCPI) programs in the state. RCPI trains law enforcement and community members in community policing philosophy, strategies, and tactics.

To work in partnership with the community, the department has 72 problem oriented policing (POP) officers deployed throughout the city. Each team of 12 officers is responsible for developing relations with the community and problem-solving issues through community oriented policing strategies. A sergeant who reports directly to an area captain supervises each team of officers.

The department currently has a sergeant and eight school resource officers (SRO) assigned to eight high and six middle schools. Funding for these positions is through a Department of Justice, Universal Hiring Plan supplemental grant. Among many duties, school resource officers are required to:

- Work closely with school staff to identify specific problems and focus on long-term solutions.
- Maintain a highly visible and open presence on each campus to encourage positive student interaction.
- Closely monitor the various functions within the school and youth community.
- Conduct off campus duties of picking up truants, and networking with community businesses and neighbors.
- Work closely with any conflict resolution or truancy program at each site.
- Schedule presentations and training to school staff, students, and parents as requested on school safety and crime prevention issues.
- Act as liaison officer between school site and police department.

- Conduct follow-up investigations of crimes that occur on or near the school campuses when possible.

The department also has eight detectives assigned to the Youth and Family Services Section within the Office of Investigations. Their function is to address juvenile delinquency and family violence. Future plans are to incorporate the School Resource Officer Program within the section.

Currently, the Sacramento Police Department has a four year integrated high school program entitled "The Academy of Criminal Justice and Community Services" at three high schools in the city. Similar programs exist in other cities, but what makes this program in Sacramento unique is that it is the first to have a complete and equal partnership with the school district. The program focuses on studies in the criminal justice field, teamwork, high academic achievement and the development of career skills through continued education.

The current Sacramento Police Department's vision, mission, and values statement was modified for the purpose of this article. The vision statement describes what the department's goal is for the future. The mission statement identifies how the department will work in partnership with the community to address quality of life issues. The values statement identifies core characteristics or principles that guide attitudes, decisions, and actions.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Sacramento Police Department is to work in partnership with the schools to protect life and property, solve neighborhood problems, and enhance the quality of life for present and future generations.

Vision Statement

The Sacramento Police Department is dedicated to establishing a direction and plan for the future. There will exist a high level of confidence and trust between the police and community. A partnership will be developed between law enforcement and schools to build a strong foundation for our leaders of tomorrow.

Values

As members of the Sacramento Police Department, we accept responsibility for contributing to the quality of life in our community. We believe the character of our Department is best reflected in the quality of service provided by each of our members. We will meet the challenges to provide quality through our shared values and commitment to:

- Serve in an impartial, courteous, responsive, and effective manner.
- Maintain an attitude that respects the dignity and rights of those we serve.
- Facilitate open communication with the public.
- Support inclusion and diversity in our organization and in our community.
- Professionalism which is the result of a clear sense of perspective and direction, strengthened by teamwork and innovation.

- Remain enthusiastic and put empathy first and foremost in public and employee relations.
- Promote community involvement and cooperation.
- Be ever mindful that we are members of the public we serve.

All that we do will reflect a "commitment" which ensures we merit the support and trust of our community.[16]

Goals and Objectives

The Sacramento Police department has been the lead partner in the operation of police resource centers since 1993. Each of these would be staffed with a School Resource Officer. The police resource center is a multi-disciplinary approach to solving problems. The centers operate in centralized locations in disenfranchised neighborhoods that have high crime rates. The resource centers offer easy access to a variety of services customized for the particular needs of the surrounding community.

For example, the Stockton Boulevard Resource Center is located in a large enclave of Southeast Asians and offers a variety of services to address the specific needs of that population, such as employment services and any other social needs. Additionally, the police department works in partnership with service providers in the center to facilitate any identified needs that are adversely impacting this group, such as gang prevention workshops, mentoring, and assisting with after school activities. The centers are used as "Safe Havens", which the community feels safe to use for meetings and other group functions. All of the centers are operated by a multitude of partners who work together within the facilities to solve problems that are affecting the surrounding

neighborhoods. Based on the success of Resource Centers, the Sacramento Police Department would expand this program to be used on six high school campuses. The following is a description of the goals and objectives that would be utilized with a Service Resource on the high school campuses in the City of Sacramento:

- Establish a consistent presence on campuses through establishment of six resource centers within one year. One center would be located at a designated school site in each of the six police sectors within the city.
- Evaluation and development of safe school plans and increase safety measures on campuses within six months of operation. Annual reviews and evaluations will be the responsibility of the assigned school resource officer at the conclusion of each school year. Statistics will be collected on any reported crimes, truancy rates, student drop out, attendance, student achievement, discipline, and frequency of service delivery by other partners.
- In addition to police personnel, service providers such as neighborhood services, parks and recreation staff and other community-based organizations will be invited to participate as partners located at the site delivering their services.
- Establish additional services such as mentoring, counseling, recreation and support services within six months of operation.
- Facilitation of conflict resolution, student/faculty problem identification, prioritization, commitment plan development at all six schools during the first six months of operation.

Currently, there are three police resource centers within the city; two located in the southern section, and one is in the northwest portion. All of which are located within business complexes.

Expected Outcomes

- Law enforcement and the community will immediately begin working together to address school issues.
- Law enforcement will become better informed of the issues facing schools and students.
- Law enforcement will develop better partnerships with service providers.
- Tension between law enforcement and students will be reduced.
- Student and community trust will further develop as they see law enforcement working with schools.
- Number of reported crimes and incidents will decrease.
- Improved test scores of the student population.
- Students will be more likely to seek assistance from school administration and police.

Conclusion

This article has identified public safety issues affecting large urban police agencies in providing services to high schools that demand a coordinated response from a multitude of stakeholders. These groups include students, parents, school administration, city/county social services, community based organizations, and the Sacramento City Neighborhood Services Division. Comprehensive community collaboration is essential

to develop strategies that impact problems emerging on high school campuses. The ever-changing and dynamic landscape in high schools demands a multi-disciplinary approach to adjust to change during these fiscally challenging times. It is clear that a multi-disciplinary approach from involved stakeholders, integrated with existing police services, are essential to manage the complex concerns and problems associated with high schools. Even though police agencies will play an important role in the future of high schools, it is clear that public safety concerns cannot be handled through their efforts alone. Issues facing our schools are complex in nature and often difficult to discern. They affect not only the schools themselves, but also the surrounding neighborhoods they serve.

The development of the school resource officer program on high school campuses has significant implications on police and school leadership. The chief of police and school superintendent must demonstrate the vision and focus to lead a group to assist with high school issues. As leaders of the police department and schools, they have the opportunity and leverage to significantly impact and motivate others in the implementation and commitment of school resource officer programs on high school campuses. As chief executives, they have the ability to make change happen through their authority, leadership, and dedication to the program. The chief of police and school superintendent are key members in delivering a unified message to the public to gain acceptance and commitment from them.

As the youth population increases, several institutional systems will need to significantly increase services in the foreseeable future. Along with this population increase, it is projected that crimes involving youthful offenders will be on the rise and

will become a major public safety concern.[17] Schools and police are extremely important components in any meaningful planning to address these concerns. However, it is also the responsibility of the entire community, both public and private, to assist in a collaborative manner in the planning, development, and implementation of strategic programs to meet these demands to ameliorate potential problems before they occur. The school resource officer program outlined in this article would be a catalyst for preventing problems and assisting in the development of successful futures for youth. It is incumbent upon both police and school leaders to work together to make the school resource officer program a reality before the problems become catastrophic and a whole generation of youth are adversely affected in a long term fashion. "Pay now, or pay later!"

NOTES

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[2] Federal Bureau of Investigation, *School Crime and Safety*. Law Enforcement Bulletin – March 2002. Internet. <www.fbi.gov/publications/leb/2002/mar02leb.htm>. accessed March 29, 2002.

[3] Andrea Cavanaugh, *Survey: Students Have Access to Guns, Take Weapons to School*. Internet. Associated Press. accessed April 1, 2001.

[4] Angelfire, *Past School Shootings*. Internet. <www.angelfire.com/wagodexists/shooting.html>. accessed June 18, 2002.

[5] National Institute of Justice, *School Safety Research and Evaluation*. June 2000. Internet. <Hwww.ncjrs.org/txtfiles1/nij/sl000428.txtH>. accessed May 10, 2002.

[6] California Constitution. *Section 28© to Article 1*. 1982.

[7] National Institute of Justice, 2.

[8] Shalala, 4.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Donna Leinwand, *Youth Need More Drug Treatment Programs, Study Says*. Internet. USA Today. accessed February 8, 2002.

[11] National Institute of Justice, *Youth Gangs in Schools*. August 2000. Internet. <Hwww.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000_8_2/intro.htmlH>. accessed July 27, 2002.

[12] Jeffery L. Edleson, Ph.D. *Problems Associated with Children's Witnessing of Domestic Violence*. Internet. Violence Against Women Online Resources. <Hwww.vaw.umn.edu/vawnet/witness.htmH>. accessed July 28, 2002.

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[17] James Alan Fox, "American Killer Are Getting Younger," USA Today Magazine, January 1994, p. 24-26

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