

Creation or Evolution?

Establishing an Educational/Law Enforcement Partnership

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

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Creation or Evolution?

Establishing an Educational/Law Enforcement Partnership

The Creation versus Evolution question has been debated for centuries. The question, as it relates to human origin, has no “right” answer. Individual answers are based upon belief, upbringing and circumstances unique to each. Applying this question to partnerships between schools and their local law enforcement agencies, though, encourages discussion regarding what the “right answer” might be. In all cases, the partnership has to be right for each entity involved and for the overall community. In some instances, a “cookie-cutter” program may work, thus “creation” of a reality full-formed. In other instances, some adaptation, or “evolution”, may be required. Each of these endeavors will be unique. This is what will make such a partnership worthwhile and successful.

Throughout the country, there are a variety of examples of Educational-Law Enforcement partnerships. Some are as simple as a patrol officer stopping by a local elementary school on a regular basis. This can be viewed as the most basic form of “partnership”. Others are as complex as entire police departments dedicated only to the school district and the community that they directly serve. Both of these approaches can be successful. The importance is what each *community* views as success.

No matter what the partnership actually “looks” like, there are some components that are common in any collaborative effort. While these factors tend to remain constant, there are external factors that need as much, if not more, consideration. On the pages that follow, we will look at the history of school/police partnerships, and also some of the

external factors that support or hinder their development. We will also take a look at an example of one success story from California's Central Valley.

Historical Perspective

The history of Educational/Law Enforcement collaboration began when sworn police officers were assigned to schools in Flint, Michigan in 1957.¹ While this can be traced back 50 years, most school police officer positions have been created in the last 10 years.² This trend primarily emerged due to the increase in violence on school campuses; most notably incidents such as Columbine High School and Virginia Tech University. The fact is that now police officers are "expected" to be a part of the school environment.³ While the reasons in 1957 may not be the same as today, the fact remains that these collaborative efforts have remained.

One thing that has remained constant is the fact that people want to be assured that their children are being taught in a safe, secure environment. Are these partnerships the answer to a safer school environment? Some studies suggest just that. In 2004, the American School and University published a report indicating violent crime victimization rates for students 12 to 18 years old declined from 48 incidents per 1,000 students in

¹ Ibid

² Ibid

³ Ibid, pg.3

1992 to 28 incidents per 1,000 students in 2001.⁴ This is in spite of other studies that estimate between 100,000 and 250,000 students each day carry a gun to school.⁵

It is understood that there may be additional factors (such as national and local crime trends) that may also influence this study. This statistic is encouraging; however, government may have also had an impact on this fact. In California, there is a detailed history of collaboration between law enforcement and schools. Some examples include:

- The School Law Enforcement Partnership to Strengthen School Safety (1983) was established by the State legislature and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Through this partnership, grants are awarded to school sites for implementation of a portion of their comprehensive safe school plans and fund eligible school districts for training and conflict resolution and youth mediation programs. The partnership also conducts regional training conferences and provides resource materials and technical assistance to schools and law enforcement agencies through a cadre of expert educational and law enforcement professionals.
- The Safe Schools Task Force, created in 1999 is designed to inform California leaders on the latest development in school safety strategies.

⁴ Providing Safe Schools (January 2004), American School and University [online] accessed August 7, 2007, available: <http://www.asumag.com>

⁵ Ibid

The final report included 8 key policy recommendation areas and 43 strategies to strengthen school safety in California.⁶

Nationally, legislators have also taken a pro-active stance on school violence. As recently as August 2007, Senator Patrick Leahy issued a statement on the School Safety Law Enforcement Improvement Act which stated in part, “The tragedy at Virginia Tech. should remind us all that we need to remain vigilant and that we need to respond in realistic and meaningful ways when we are presented with such challenges.”⁷ Legislation such as this, as well as continued community demand for school safety, will continue to draw attention to the need for effective school-public safety partnerships.

What is not included in the legislation is how a partnership will “look”. There are many existing models, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. The most common is the School Resource Officer (SRO). Locally, the duties and responsibilities vary, but generally they serve as instructors, law enforcers, advisors and role models.⁸ According to Hebert, an “SRO serves as liaison between the police department and the school

⁶ Prevent Crime and Violence in California, Safe State [online] accessed August 6, 2007, California Attorney General’s Crime and Violence Prevention Center available: <http://safestate.org>

⁷ Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) August 2, 2007 [online] available: <http://www.leahy.senate.gov>

⁸ Hebert, L. (2007, June 29). *Building a School Community Partnership with School Resource Officers*. Retrieved from the Connexions Web site: <http://cnx.org/content/m14649/1.1/>

department providing law enforcement services, as well as insuring a safe school atmosphere by assisting in the administration of school rules and policies.”

External Factors

In today’s environment, education is being constrained by increasing pressure to meet academic standards. Legislation such as “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) Act has mandated that by 2013-14 all children meet the definition of academically “proficient”.⁹ This call to increase academic proficiency has put increasing pressure on schools to use their time in academic pursuit. This has put an increased demand on tested subject time. With increasing scrutiny on test scores, schools are finding it more difficult to devote time to “life-skills” type issues. The Center on Education Policy issued a report stating that this law is having a positive effect to more closely align curriculum standards, and as a result, test scores are rising. The Washington based research organization found that seventy-one percent of school districts reported that they had decreased time spent on subjects not specified for testing under NCLB.¹⁰

Law Enforcement is also feeling external pressures. Fiscal reductions have caused agencies to re-examine traditional approaches to Law Enforcement. Regional dispatch centers and task forces are examples of how law enforcement has responded to some of these reductions. Collaborative efforts, although difficult, can be an answer to increasing efficiency and effectiveness. Educational/Law enforcement efforts are no

⁹ EdSource online NCLB Overview, <http://www.edsource.org>; accessed 6/2/2008.

¹⁰ Edweek online; Study :NCLB Leads to Cuts for some Subjects; Davis, Michelle; <http://www.Edweek.org>; accessed 6/17/2008.

exception. The challenge is going to be to continue to fund these efforts. In California, the proposed budget for FY 2008/2009 includes a suggestion to reduce State COPS/Juvenile Justice funding by ten percent.¹¹ Only time will tell what the actual impact will be to Law Enforcement.

In the late 1990's, over 30 million dollars were awarded to 275 law enforcement agencies to fund partnership efforts.¹² Given the current financial picture, it is unknown what grant funding will continue to be available. The good news is that the history shows Educational/Law Enforcement partnerships has been successful. This is reflected by the fact that they have been around for more than fifty years. As we explore the future of these efforts, the past must be considered. This will put the ideas into perspective as the partnerships look to advancing. There are many examples of these efforts throughout the country, each with its own and unique characteristics. Let's consider the following.....

Case Study

An example of creativity and adaptation can be found in Visalia, California. Visalia is located in central California with a population of 120,000 people. Of the 136 allocated peace officer positions, eleven are dedicated to school-related assignments. These include nine campus police officers and a sergeant to supervise them. The partnership that the Visalia Police Department has with the Visalia Unified School

¹¹ Cactivities.org online; <http://www.cactivities.org>, accessed 6/17/2007

¹² Dorn, Michael (2002) "School/Law Enforcement Partnerships; A Guide to Police Work in Schools" Ram Publishing, pg. 1

District dates back more than thirty years. This rich history has allowed the partnership to develop to what it is today.

Over the past few years, Visalia has seen an increase in gang-related violence. Recognizing that the solution to this problem was multi-faceted, Visalia Police Chief Bob Carden emphasized suppression, intervention and prevention. As part of the prevention effort, the partnership with the School District was relied upon. Adapting the nationally recognized GREAT (Gang Resistance and Education Training) Program, the Police Department assembled a curriculum that is unique to the community. Officer Rob Zieg was able to take elements of this program, his own twenty years of experience, and needs of the community to develop a unique, directed presentation. Understanding the importance of overall community well-being, the Visalia Unified School District has arranged for this to be taught in the classroom. Furthermore, Officer Zieg adapts this program to the individual *school's* needs.

What is worth noting is the fact that this program is unique to Visalia and, through the school partnership, this information (which is more of a community issue) is taught in the school setting. Asked to evaluate the success of the program, Officer Zieg replied, "The relationships that I develop in class continue beyond school. This relationship allows me to act as a mentor, coach, and, at times, even a parent. The success I see is not reflected by statistics, but in the actions and behaviors of my students."

Officer Zieg's program is presented in the twenty-four elementary schools. He averages eighteen presentations per week. This has an effect on more than 8500 students each year. More importantly is the fact that Visalia Unified allows over eighteen hours per week for instruction. Visalia Unified's Coordinator of Student Support Services,

Lucinda Mejdell-Awbrey, PHN, MA stated, “Student safety is a priority.” She added that in our community, prevention is the key to improving the community overall. Mejdell-Awbrey commented on Officer Zieg’s program and its effectiveness. In addition to the curriculum, she credited his flexibility and style, along with his willingness to meet anytime with students, staff and parents as contributing to the School District’s continued support of the program.



Visalia, CA Police Officer Rob Zieg during a recent school presentation

This is an example of a partnership that has been in existence for a number of years. Both jurisdictions bring their own issues and stakeholders. While forming a partnership may be as easy as copying an existing one, it may not be as effective. There are many possible reasons to form such a relationship. According to Herrera, it is agreed that a strong partnership between law enforcement and schools require being pro-active

and receptive to recommendations and organizational change.¹³ It is accepted that by working together, schools and police can collaboratively lessen crime and violence.¹⁴ Violence reduction may be the reason a partnership is formed, but in order to do so will require a first step.

No matter what the initial reason for formation is, the first step is commitment. This commitment must be equally understood. In part of, and primarily due to, the success of the Police-School partnership, Visalia (California) Unified School District Superintendent Stan A. Carrizosa recently reaffirmed what the role and presence of Visalia Police officers on their campuses means in a communication to all families in the District. It read:

VUSD Partners with Visalia Police Department

“You may be aware that Visalia Unified School District partners with the Visalia PD to house a full-time uniformed police officer on each of our middle school and high school campuses including our continuation school.

This has been a successful relationship that has resulted in making Visalia Schools among the safest places in our community.

These officers not only provide law enforcement support for any illegal actions that may occur on or around school grounds, but perhaps more importantly, they serve as prevention and intervention. They work closely with school officials to provide student support and parent education. They build positive relationships with kids, teachers and parents and

¹³ Law Enforcement in School Partnership as a Solution to Truancy; Herrera, Susan [online] accessed August 2007, National Center for School Engagement.

¹⁴ Hebert, L. (2007, June 29). *Building a School Community Partnership with School Resource Officers*. Retrieved from the Connexions Web site:

<http://cnx.org/content/m14649/1.1/>

keep open lines of communication among all parties. We refer to our campus police officers as Youth Service Officers and in addition to being on the school campus during regular school hours, they also attend after-school and evening activities such as sporting contests, performing arts events and all major events such as proms and graduations.

The Visalia Unified School District is proud to support this strong partnership with VPD in an effort to keep our schools safe for student staff and the entire school community.”



Visalia, California Youth Services Officers

This is a perfect example of how commitment is emphasized within the community. What is significant is that in many situations, the Law Enforcement partner is seen as taking the lead role. While this is to be expected, it is imperative the commitment is communicated equally by both parties. Additionally, this statement was issued very recently. One would expect this commitment at the initial stages, but after thirty years? This may be the reason for the prolonged success.

Conclusion

In response to the initial question "Creation or Evolution?" the answer in this case is "Yes" to both. First comes the will or desire to create a partnership. The next step is the evolution of the created partnership. The evolution is where all of the creativity and flexibility will determine if the partnership is a success. Of course, the future is always unknown. In looking at trends that may help predict the potential future realities, though, financing and collaborative efforts come to mind. Society demands accountability in government. One way to achieve this demand is to explore collaborative efforts. Although Educational/Law Enforcement partnerships have been around for more than fifty years, the future holds opportunities not previously explored. What these will resemble remains to be seen; each community's external factors as well as unique community needs will be determining factors.

No matter what the future holds, there are initial steps that must be taken that lead to a desired outcome. Two key points to success are commitment and communication. Once these two areas are mastered, then any goals set are much more easily achieved. Having the insight, support, and flexibility to implement such a partnership will be the challenge to overcome.

Each community, with its own values and needs, will have a "unique" partnership. This uniqueness is what will really make the effort work. While it may initially be easier to try to copy or recreate one, the most effective and efficient partnership will be tailored to the needs of each organization and the community. This

will require a great deal of effort during the planning and implementation phases. Once this effort is put forth, the chances of a successful partnership are greatly increased.

Winston Churchill once said, “If we are together, nothing is impossible. If we are divided, all will fail.” As we look forward to the future of the Educational/Law Enforcement partnership this quote is increasingly fitting. Collaborative efforts are here to stay, and our challenge becomes the successful implementation of each.