

## **Teen and Police Service (TAPS) Academy**

### **Houston Police Department**

#### **Summary**

In early 2011 the Houston Chief of Police Charles A. McClelland, Jr. inspired his command staff to strive to better serve the community. As a result, HPD Assistant Chief Brian Lumpkin teamed up with the University of Houston – Clear Lake (UHCL) professor Dr. Everette Penn to create the Teen and Police Service (TAPS) Academy modeled after the Citizen’s Police Academy to target at-risk youth in the community. They shared their ideas with the Department of Justice – Office of Community Oriented Policing Services who in turn awarded HPD a grant in September 2011 to fund the program. In addition, HPD and UHCL partnered with Texas Southern University (TSU) to formally evaluate TAPS.

The goal of the TAPS program is to reduce the social distance between at-risk youth and law enforcement through learning, interaction, and problem solving. Dr. Penn’s literature review revealed that youth, especially minorities, have largely negative views toward police. Dr. Penn conducted a study at an urban High School and approximately 13.6% of the students “liked” the police, 37.6% had “indifferent feelings”, and 48.8% “disliked” the police.

The first three TAPS Academies were held at a Houston alternative school for fifteen weeks for two hours each session. The first academy met twice a week and the subsequent two academies convened once a week. Ten officer mentors met with and instructed approximately fifty at-risk teenagers. At the start of class a police instructor or

community member gave a dynamic lecture geared towards the youth. The youth and mentors then broke off into smaller groups to discuss the lecture and apply it to their lives. Afterwards, the students reconvened with the entire class and a representative from each group gave a brief presentation on their group's findings. A specialized division ended the class with an exciting demonstration.

TSU's evaluation revealed that TAPS students had the following improvement scores at the end of the academy: 33% higher trust towards police, 32% increase in respect for police, 33% higher feelings of being connected to the police, and 29% more liking the police. The future of TAPS Academy looks very promising. For example, UHCL is piloting a TAPS Club at a local Houston High School and leading efforts to implement a TAPS Academy in Tampa, Florida this fall. Likewise, additional TAPS Academies are being planned in Houston.

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## Description

### **A. Scanning**

Early in 2011 during a Houston Police Department (HPD) command staff meeting Chief of Police Charles A. McClelland, Jr. gave a passionate speech about the importance of finding creative ways to improve the community. At that time due to the unstable nature of the economy and the looming 2012 fiscal budget which did not look promising, Chief McClelland suggested that the department's upper management possibly seek out grant opportunities to help HPD officers better serve our community. This fervent speech struck a chord with Assistant Chief Brian Lumpkin. He felt inspired to collaborate with his colleague, Dr. Everette Penn, a renowned criminologist working at the University of Houston – Clear Lake (UHCL).

While brainstorming specific problems that plagued the community Dr. Penn asked Chief Lumpkin, "What are you doing to address the Chad Holley's?" To preface, in 2010 a group of HPD Westside tactical officers arrested a teenager, Chad Holley, for burglary and consequently, a local business leaked a surveillance video of the arrest to the media. This widely publicized video of officers allegedly using excessive force while they took the teenager into custody, greatly embarrassed the department and damaged the community's perception of the police. Subsequently, twelve officers were disciplined, seven were fired, and four were charged.

Chief Lumpkin similarly observed that HPD's community policing was lacking in regards to working with teenagers soon to become part of the adult workforce. They pondered the questions: Do officers understand teens' lives? Do teens understand

officers' perspectives? They concluded they desired to reduce the social distance between at-risk teens and the police by creating an opportunity for these teens to learn from and interact with police.

Chief Lumpkin and Dr. Penn studied HPD's current successful community program called the Citizen's Police Academy. Chief Lumpkin observed in each citizen academy even the most anti-police citizens seemed in the end to build a better relationship with the department. Chief Lumpkin wanted to model this program but instead target the "Chad Holley's" (meaning the teenagers in danger of becoming delinquent). An alternative school seemed like the ideal location because this mentoring program sought to serve the most at-risk teenagers. Officers would work with these youth and show them that HPD officers are not the enemy, but rather are there to protect and serve. This new program would be modeled after the Citizen's Police Academy with the exception of not presenting police tactics.

Dr. Penn looked at research and programs that worked with officers and teens, and subsequently observed a missing link between highly at-risk teenagers and police. Meanwhile, Chief Lumpkin with his vast experience in the public sector kept his eye out for possible grants. He found The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grant in regards to agencies working to help juveniles. After many hours of brainstorming and research, the Teen And Police Service (TAPS) Academy was conceived. They recruited Texas Southern University (TSU) in the TAPS partnership to formally evaluate this program.

In September 2011 the DOJ COPS Office awarded the TAPS grant # 2011CKWXK009 for \$468,660 to HPD with UHCL as the lead researching university

and TSU as the formal evaluating university. Chief Lumpkin was designated as HPD's Program Manager, Dr. Penn was selected as UHCL's Principal Investigator, and Dr. Helen Greene signed on to lead TSU's evaluation efforts. The Houston Independent School District (HISD) alternative school, Beechnut Academy, also joined the TAPS partnership as the local host school.

## **B. Analysis**

Despite the colossal success of being awarded the grant there were still mountains of red-tape and extensive research that needed to be conducted before the actual program could be implemented. The Houston City Council voted to accept the COPS grant to fund the TAPS Academy. Chief Lumpkin met with community members in a Public Safety Committee meeting chaired by City Council member James G. Rodriguez answering questions regarding the new TAPS program. In addition, HPD Officer Treva Mott was instrumental in writing the Cooperate Agreements between HPD and our partners COPS, UHCL and TSU along with a Memorandum of Understanding with Beechnut Academy. HPD Budget & Finance and Legal Services divisions provided feedback on drafting these key contracts. COPS Program Manager, Cynthia Pappas, also worked enthusiastically with Chief Lumpkin on the TAPS grant.

There are a number of significant requirements in the COPS Cooperative Agreement. First and foremost, the TAPS Academy aims to reduce the social distance between at-risk youth and law enforcement while exchanging ideas and learning from one another. One specific grant goal is to produce a body of literature about the needs, perceptions and

feelings of teenagers, especially minorities, related to law enforcement, crime, and crime prevention. This literature should advance community policing. The grant also aims to create graduates who understand the roles of police and to prepare youth to build better communities.

Another requirement listed in the COPS Cooperative Agreement is to develop a technical assistance guidebook to serve as an instructor's manual for other agencies wanting to establish a TAPS Academy in their jurisdictions. Likewise, TAPS needs to develop a media strategy using website and other social networking for existing and alumni students to stay connected with officers and community members. The grant also requires working with a non-profit entity. Beechnut Academy fills this role.

To advance community policing, the grant necessitates working with an outside police agency to implement another TAPS Academy. The true test is whether the program can be successfully duplicated. Other departments could make small modifications to meet their agency's needs. For example, a smaller police department could put on a TAPS Academy with only twenty-five students and five police mentors. If TAPS is only successful in Houston and not in an outside jurisdiction, then this could merely demonstrate that HPD has extraordinarily great mentors or speakers, not that the program effectively works.

Chief Lumpkin recognizes the importance of the grant funds, which allows officers to earn overtime pay, thus avoiding taking them off the streets. There is a growing community concern that there are not enough street officers, which leads to slow response times and safety issues. One example is the DARE program which frequently utilizes on-duty officers, who could have been instead patrolling the streets. By the same

token, HPD does not have any local school resource officers because there is simply not enough manpower.

Criminologist Dr. Penn has spent years researching his fields of expertise, including race and juveniles. As part of the COPS Cooperative Agreement Dr. Penn and graduate student LaDonna Brown wrote a forty page literature review titled, "Youth and Police: Solutions to Reduce Social Distance." The research showed that black youth have less positive attitudes towards law enforcement concerning the police's ability to protect the community. Also, black teenagers were less likely to think that officers would help someone in need (i.e. if sick or their car was broken down). White youth were more likely than black youth to think that police kept their neighborhoods peaceful and quiet at night. Overall, the research indicated that black youth tend to have more negative attitudes toward law enforcement, and youth in general, regardless of race, possessed negative opinions about the police.

The literature review illustrated that race, coupled with a personal incident involving what they deem as racial profiling, were the biggest predictors of having a negative view towards law enforcement. Also, vicarious experiences when a youth was not the actual target of police brutality or misconduct but was merely a third party witness or only heard secondhand information, significantly damaged the youth's view towards the police. Similarly, research showed male youth tend to believe that police are more interested in harassing people than actually fighting crime.

Besides doing extensive research for the TAPS literature review, Dr. Penn also gathered an elite panel of black criminologists who are experts in police/minority teen relationships and conducted their own study at a Houston urban high school. The study's

goal was to discover straight from the youth why social distance occurred between them and the police. Demographically the high school possessed mostly minority students (only 1% were white) with 82% considered at-risk. Specifically, 117 11<sup>th</sup> grade English students participated in the study. In an open forum, the expert panel asked the students three questions: “Do you like the police?” “Why do you dislike/like them?” and “When are you going to age out?” In other words, what would make students change their minds about their views toward law enforcement.

By the raise of hands approximately 13.6% of the students “liked” the police, 37.6% had “indifferent feelings”, and 48.8% “disliked” the police. The students gave a wide variety of answers defending their positions. For example, one student stated he was friends with one officer and that was why he liked all law enforcement showing that one good officer can have a positive impact on the youth. Another teen answered that he liked the police because they did their job at controlling chaos. One “indifferent” student stated the police were “okay” as long as you did not get in trouble. Also, the youth “disliked” the police partly due to perceived abuse of power (i.e. excessive force) or lack of police accountability (i.e. running red lights unnecessarily to buy a bag of chips at the convenience store). Several students advocated that officers were racist or “crooked.”

In regards to changing their attitudes towards the police, the youth indicated they were not prepared to change their current views. Some youth indicated they would never change their attitudes while others gave “if-then” responses stating that “if” the police changed for the better, “then” the youth would like them more. Finally, the expert panel assigned the youth an essay assignment titled, “If you were the chief of police of Houston, TX, what would you do to strengthen the relationship between police and



youth?” The English teacher graded the essays and gave them to the expert panel. Only 40 students turned in usable essays. Most essays indicated that the police/youth relationship was gravely broken but three major themes arose to fix the relationship: mentoring, communication, and teen forums. Overall, despite the seemingly bleak tone between at-risk teens and police, Dr. Penn concluded from his research that this social distance problem was real and TAPS Academy strived to fix that broken link.

One of the biggest challenges of creating a new, innovative community program from scratch is dealing with the “bureaucrat”. According to Chief Lumpkin every department has at least one bureaucrat who is “afraid of their own shadow” and afraid to work with kids. The bureaucrat loves to create layers of frustration and paperwork. This is partially due to the fear of liability of adults working closely with children in a world where it is not uncommon to hear news stories of a community leader charged with molesting children. Hence, TAPS was always intended to have at least two adults per group of teenagers. Originally, the plan was to meet in one large group for the lecture portion and then split off into smaller classrooms for the mentor/student discussions. However, HPD learned that when all the teens were in one room for the duration of the discussion, the class ran smoother providing real creativity and flexibility.

The bureaucrat resists change and paperwork that should be simple turns out to be very cumbersome to write, such as cooperative agreements. The bureaucrat is also fearful of the responsibility and possible litigation of overseeing such a large amount of grant money. Another bureaucracy challenge is finding an outside police agency with the required passion and ability to host another TAPS Academy. This took longer than originally anticipated to arrange. Overall, despite the challenges of getting past the

bureaucracy layers, Chief Lumpkin found “the good Lord was on his side” and TAPS continued to press forward.

### **C. Response**

With the analysis stage out of the way the actual implementation phase could commence. Officer Mott called each patrol station evening shift and night shift lieutenant asking them to recommend their best officers for the mentor program. The lieutenants discussed the possible choices with their sergeants and officers. Some self-motivated officers hearing about TAPS took the initiative to personally contact Chief Lumpkin and asked to be new mentors. In the end there were more recommendations than open positions and Chief Lumpkin used seniority as the final ranking factor, which eventually flushed out a really diverse group of ten mentors and five alternates. These officers attended a mandatory six hour TAPS mentor training class with presenters from HPD, UHCL, TSU, Beechnut Academy, and special guest speaker Cynthia Pappas from COPS. Despite being in uncharted waters the officers were eager to fulfill their new roles as mentors.

Just weeks away from the start of TAPS Academy #1 only a few vital tasks remained like the arduous undertaking of prescheduling all the lectures and demos given by specialized HPD divisions and community leaders. A confirmed agenda was set up with the flexibility to reschedule presentations if needed. Also, TSU worked closely with Beechnut Academy to select approximately fifty of the most at-risk students for the program. Since Beechnut is an alternate school, students have compulsory attendance

mandates or in other words they are “sentenced” to the school for a certain amount of time before returning to their home school. This time frame was based on the seriousness of the school policy they violated, crime committed, or number of trancies. Only students sentenced for at least the duration of the program (15 weeks) were selected; meaning the students with the most serious violations and longest sentences were chosen for participation (i.e. the most at-risk students). Lastly, the parents filled out a permission slip for their child to participate in TAPS and a media release form with the option to allow TAPS to publish their child’s photos.

Finally, the first TAPS Academy began on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012 in record time only four months after the grant was awarded. The first TAPS Academy consisted of 15 weeks of classes meeting for two hours with the youth twice a week during school hours. In a typical class the mentors and instructors met at noon inside the Beechnut Academy gym to discuss the daily agenda and set up tables. At approximately 12:30 p.m. the Beechnut Academy staff escorted the students to the gym. Next, the special guest speaker gave a dynamic lecture geared towards the youth. Topics included: Driver safety, why crime occurs, gangs, conflict management, crime reduction, narcotics, search and seizure, bullying, active shooter, robbery, minors in possession, team building (by the Houston Fire Department), truancy, sexting and dating abuse, community problems, shoplifting, evading, and runaways.

After the lecture the students broke off into smaller groups of ten students with two mentors to discuss the lecture topic and apply it to the teens’ lives. Often specific questions were assigned for discussion. This was really what the heart of TAPS was all about – having the youth and mentors share personal life experiences with one another

showing the youth there were better paths in life than the road they were on. Throughout these lively discussions the students were provided multicolored dry erase markers and easels to write their answers, as well as large poster paper. During these break-out sessions the teens and mentors ate a light snack and drinks helped lift the teens' spirits. The students and mentors then met back together in one large group. The students selected a representative to give a brief presentation on their findings to the entire class.

Lastly, a specialized HPD division presented a demo to end the class with a fun last memory showing a more exciting side of HPD. Some of the demonstrators included Air Support (helicopters), Solo (motorcycles), Mounted Patrol, SRG (Special Response Group which handles riots and large crowd control), K-9, Bomb Squad, HPD's renowned forensic artist Lois Gibson, and SWAT. After the student dismissal at 2:30 p.m. the mentors and TAPS leaders met for a thirty minute debriefing to analyze the class's level of success and suggest improvements. One suggested change that was adopted was both the mentors and students agreed they liked having the same mentors assigned to specific groups every class versus rotating. Likewise, due to the nature of being an alternative school, many students were already behind on their schoolwork and Beechnut staff felt that two 2-hr TAPS class per week took the students away from their studies, so subsequently the next TAPS Academies were shortened to one 2-hr class per week. The teens and mentors also participated in service projects like learning self-reliance skills by building several large gardening planters at Beechnut Academy.

Overall, the first TAPS Academy class was a great success and the students graduated on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. The HPD Honor Guard presented colors and the national anthem was sung by Officer Teter. Speakers included Chief McClelland, Bernard K.

Melekian (Director of COPS), Dr. Penn, the Beechnut Academy principal, a student representative, and Chief Lumpkin. The students presented their official TAPS Academy class flag which the students designed themselves and HPD had professionally made. Chief McClelland and the COPS Director presented the students with their graduation certificates with a professional photographer capturing the moment. At the conclusion everyone enjoyed pizza, sodas and a celebration cake. Graduation was a special day for the students and their parents/guardians, since many of these teens had never been officially recognized in such a grand fashion.

HPD successfully implemented two additional TAPS Academies at Beechnut in Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. Likewise, UHCL is leading efforts to hold another TAPS Academy in Tampa, Florida in Fall 2013. However, to effectively measure TAPS level of success warrants a much more detailed assessment including analyzing TSU's evaluations.

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#### **D. Assessment**

TSU implemented a number of strategies to evaluate the TAPS program including pre/post surveys of officers and teens, direct observation, presentation evaluations by the teens, and focus groups. Dr. Greene, Dr. Penn, and Dr. Chenelle Jones published some of their findings in the article, "Reducing Social Distance Between Law Enforcement and Youth: An Evaluation of the Teen and Police Service (TAPS) Academy". They also measured control groups (both officers and teenagers) not involved in TAPS to take pre/post surveys measuring social distance. The TAPS Academy class #1 study included

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70 at-risk teenagers from Beechnut Academy and 27 HPD officers. The teen sample was 50% black, 40% Hispanic, 3% American Indian, 2% white, 2% other, and 3% not identifying a race. The officers in the study were 39% black, 24% Hispanic, 9% white, 9% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 19% not identifying a race.

TSU's findings revealed at the end of the academy the TAPS students had the following improvement scores: 33% higher trust towards police, 32% increased respect for police, 33% higher feelings being connected to the police, and 29% more liking the police in contrast to the control group whose views showed no change. In regards to gender, the study showed that TAPS Academy had a larger positive effect on the female participants than the males. Concerning youth age differences the results indicated the TAPS program had a more positive impact on the younger participants than the older youth. The police mentors during the pre-test showed higher levels of connectedness with the teens in the community verses officers in the control group. Yet at the end of the academy there were no changes in social distance between the experimental mentor group and the control group officer results. The evaluation showed that while TAPS Academy positively affected the youth in the study, there was little impact on the police mentors. One possible explanation for the lack of change in officer results was that pre-test officers reported less social distance than the youth; however, the more time the officers interacted with the teens the more they realized they were not as close to the teens as they first thought.

TSU's extensive evaluations showed that TAPS Academy successfully affected the youth's social distance with law enforcement. Here are just a few examples illustrating this impact:

Avery, a 250 pound quiet teen, was at first doubtful about TAPS but by the end of the academy he had become talkative and took the lead in the discussions. Likewise, he stated he believed there are more good officers than bad ones which is a complete “180” from how he felt at the beginning of the academy.

Another story involves the police pulling a vehicle over which showed to have been used in a robbery. Cameron could have mouthed off to the police like his peers claiming they were being falsely harassed; however, Cameron remembered his TAPS training about respecting the police and he transformed into a polite “yes-sir-no-sir” mode and followed orders. Subsequently, the police let him go home but ticketed the driver and transported the rest of the occupants to the police station.

In another success story, Mason’s mother told his mentors in a parent-home visit that after the TAPS gardening activity he came home and wanted to plant his own garden. His mother bought him watermelon seeds which he planted, watered, and checked on every day. Mason also told his mother what he learned in TAPS that week even saying he wanted to become a police officer or FBI agent someday.

Based on personal observations and TSU’s evaluation Chief Lumpkin learned that the mentors were successful because the same officers provided consistency in the teens’ lives. Dispatching random officers would not have offered the same level of camaraderie. Also the program used real cops who worked evenings and nights and had real street stories verses police academy or public service officers who had not run a police call in years. Also Chief Lumpkin learned that officers do not fully understand the challenges and sorrows that youth go through.

Subsequently, his experience with TAPS led Chief Lumpkin to ask HPD Sergeant Mike Hill to design a mandatory two hour in-service class on juveniles for all 5,300 HPD officers. The class explored how HPD officers have mishandled some teens in the past and what HPD had learned from those experiences. For example, in the Chad Holley incident, HPD did not fire lazy officers. These were dedicated crime-fighting officers who made an error in judgment. However, the community and media crucified them because Chad Holley was a teen. At-risk teens may look like an enemy to many officers but juveniles only make up a small portion of crime. Also, psychologists advocate that the teen years are the toughest times for both teens and parents. The adolescent brain is not fully developed until many believe the mid to late twenties.

The future of TAPS looks very promising. Chief Lumpkin hopes in future years TAPS Academy will grow and funding could possibly come from the juvenile correction system. Convicted minors could participate in TAPS to fulfill their probation or community service hours. Besides expanding TAPS Academy to other agencies, UHCL has piloted a TAPS Club at Kashmere High School in Houston for teens interested in learning more about law enforcement. As Chief Lumpkin contemplated his achievements over his past 30+ year career with HPD, he remarked that the TAPS Academy has been one of the most rewarding, interesting, and challenging things he has ever accomplished. It is his hope that the Teen And Police Service Academy's legacy will live on and continue to grow and expand.



***Key Project Team Members:***

HPD Clear Lake Division - Lt. Jason Giuffre

HPD Public Affairs Division - Officer Treva Mott

HPD South Central Division - Officer Alisa Smith

UHCL - Dr. Everette Penn

TSU - Dr. Helen Greene

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# Appendix

*Photography by Brandi Smith. Graphics from tapsacademy.org.*



*From left to right: Officers C. Cruz, J. Henderson, A. Vallejo, K. Cobb, T. Mott, Chief Lumpkin (center), Sgt. Manuel, J. Diaz, R. Johnson, M. Daniels, N. Dancer & M. Batiste*



*K-9 demonstration*



*Mentors assisting TAPS students*



*TAPS logo*



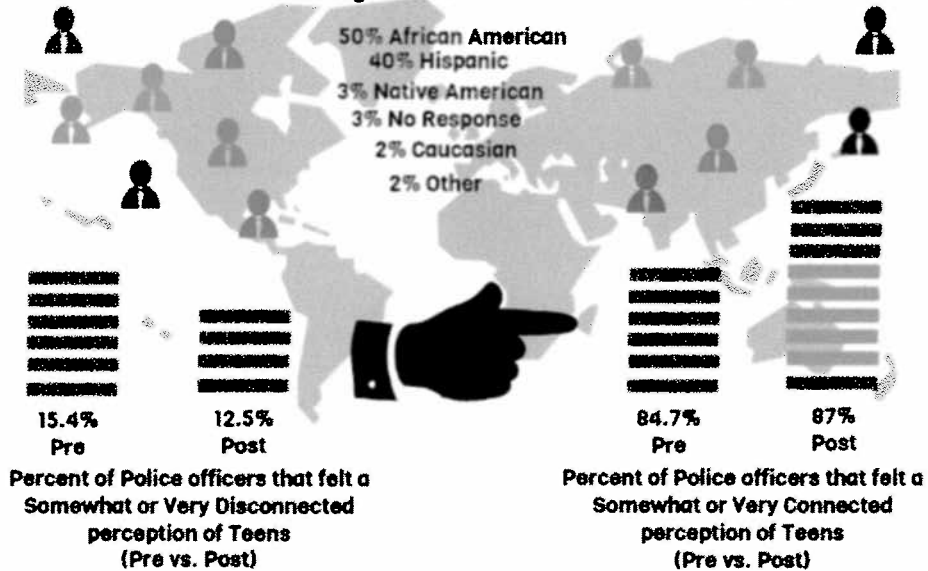
*Putting on SRG equipment*

## TAPS Academy Mission

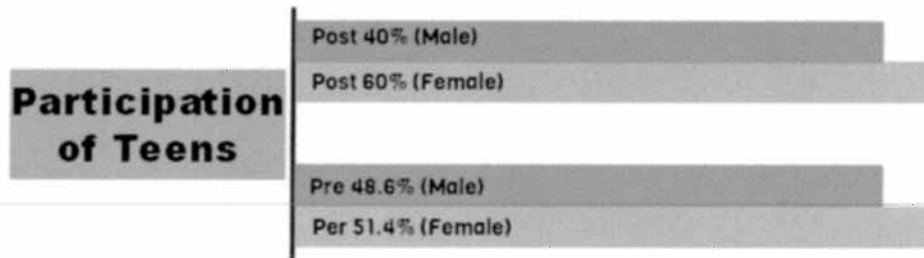


# Reduce the social distance between at-risk teens and law enforcement

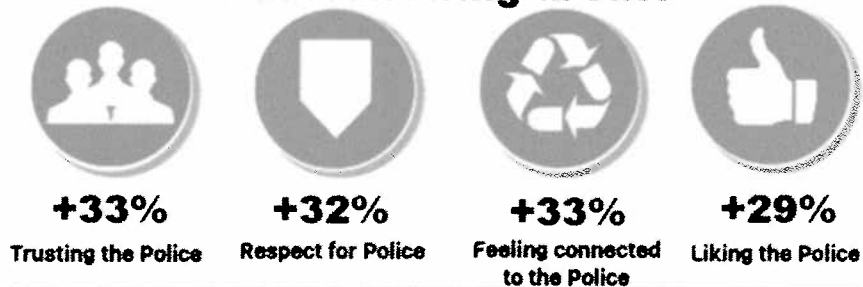
## Race/Ethnicity Characteristics of Teens



## Pre and Post Youth Demographics



## TAPS Academy Teens showed improvement in the following areas:



**An Average 31.75% increase in Police Perception!**

\*Youth NOT in TAPS Academy demonstrated NO change in their thoughts toward the police during the same time period.

## Why we need TAPS Academy for Police:

We found a Rise in Police Perception of Teens "Very Disconnected" 7.7% to 12.5%. "The more time we spent with teens the more we learned how disconnected we were to them and their lives." Officer Mentor

**Results: Youth Perception of Connection to Police (Treatment Group)**

	Pre-Program	Post Program
Very Connected	13.5%	24%
Somewhat Con	21.6%	44%
Somewhat Discon	21.6%	8%
Very Disconnected	43.2%	20%

**Youth and Social Distance Cont'd**

	Pre-Program	Post Program
Like (A/S)	35.1%	64%
Trust	51.3%	84%
Respect	60%	92%
Pol Resp. You	43%	68%

