

St. Charles Parish Safe Schools Program

Violence Prevention

Introduction

Electing to take a proactive approach to a rise in school violence nationwide and within local schools, St. Charles Parish has developed a Violence Prevention Program that has yielded as much as a 74 percent reduction in violent incidents.

What makes this program unique is that it addresses the root cause of violence and offers training to prevent future incidents. Students who fight at school are arrested. They are afforded an opportunity to avoid prosecution by participating in a diversionary program which addresses the need for conflict resolution training as well as better communication and problem solving skills. This program has been duplicated in several other school systems with similar results.

Background

Discipline records for the five-year period at both St. Charles Parish high schools reflected a significant increase in the number of student fights. High school administrators also report that student fighting has been more violent in recent years and occasionally has led to serious injuries. Another concern is that students who fight often disregard the orders of school personnel and continue to fight.

High School Administrators have visited two high schools in Louisiana to learn more about successful programs which involve local law enforcement in arresting students who fight on school premises. Both schools have witnessed a significant reduction in school fights.

Rationale

Violence and fighting is disruptive to school climate and cause students to feel physically and psychologically threatened. Studies show that a majority of students who bring weapons to school do so to defend themselves. School administrators believe students who feel safe are less likely to bring weapons to school. Guns and other weapons clearly are hazards to safe learning environment and the possibility that they will be brought to school must be significantly reduced.

Participating Agencies

The St. Charles Parish School Board along with representatives from the St. Charles Parish Sheriffs Department, St. Charles Parish District Attorney's Office, and Judges for the 29th Judicial District Court, met to discuss concerns of increased violent incidents on school campus.

All four entities agreed to implement a Violence Prevention Program that would aggressively address this increase of incidents. Yet, all agreed that simply arresting offenders and placing them into the court system was not the solution. As a result, a diversionary program was developed in an attempt to divert students from the court process and ultimately result in a dismissal of charges if program compliance exist.

The St. Charles Sheriffs Department agreed to enhance the program by providing full-time Resource Officers to be assigned to each area high school. These officers would utilize the triad concept of becoming teachers of law related education and counselors as well as their normal law enforcement duties. The program was eventually expanded to include an officer at each of the district's two (2) high schools and four (4) middle schools.

Implementation

Once the violence prevention concept was outlined, a public hearing was held to explain the concerns and program goals as well as receive public input. In addition, officials sought out community leaders and explained the program in detail while soliciting their input. This was extremely important, by identifying concerns with proven data, potential opponents to such a change in school discipline ultimately became supporters of the Violence Prevention Program.

The program was introduced into Destrehan and Hahnville High Schools at the open of the 1994/95 school year and immediately reduced reports of violent incidents. The program was introduced into the parish's four middle schools following the Thanksgiving Holidays that same year.

Notification to Parents

In addition to notification through the school system's cable access channel, public hearings, and newspaper coverage, each school mailed out a letter to each parent outlining the program.

In addition, students received instruction the first day of school, and through morning announcements and skits broadcast over the school's television system.

Process

Incidents of Violence

Every fight on campus will result in an arrest. Students have been instructed that they must avoid violent acts, (fighting, batteries, assaults, etc.) and that the correct procedure is to report bullying or other hostile behavior against them to teachers or administrators. Once a physical fight takes place, the Sheriffs Department will be notified. Each participant of the fight will be arrested , handcuffed, and taken into custody.

The school will conduct their own internal investigation. School and parish rules, and regulations regarding suspension and expulsion will be enforced. This investigation shall include the following procedure:

Following an incident which a student(s) is involved in an altercation where physical contact has taken place, the school principal, or his designee, shall conduct a thorough investigation and take the proper corrective action in accordance with the "St. Charles Parish Student Handbook" and the "29th Judicial District Court - Violence Prevention Policy." The investigation and corrective action shall take place in the following manner:

A fight shall be considered: "Physical contact which has occurred in a setting deemed improper by the school principal."

- 1, Separate the students involved and assign students to different areas under adult supervision.
- 2, Access and/or inquire about possible injuries which the students may have received during the confrontation and administer or summon medical attention immediately.
- 3, Secure any evidence which may be present following the incident, (weapons, photographs of injuries, damage, etc.)
- 4, The principal or his designee shall interview each student involved separately and as soon as possible following the incident.
- 5, The principal, or his designee shall document in writing all pertinent facts regarding the incident as well as complete a discipline form.
- 6, Each student involved shall be asked to identify all known witnesses and the principal or his designee, shall document each witness statement in writing as soon as possible following the incident.
- 7, School employees who have witnessed said disturbance/fight shall be directed to document their observation and actions.
- 8, The principal, or his designee, shall evaluate all facts and determine the

proper disciplinary action to be taken. The following areas of concern shall be addressed when making a determination.

- The severity of the disturbance/fight, (physical injury, property damage, etc.)
 - Was physical contact made by either student involved?
 - Type of setting in which disturbance/fight has taken place and its impact to the proper learning environment, (classroom, cafeteria, commons, etc.)
 - Did disturbance/fight pose a threat to school safety and security? Was a school employee struck, either or otherwise, while attempting to defuse the disturbance/fight?
 - Did each student involved cooperate in defusing the aggression? (Stopped on their own, continued verbal aggression, continued physical aggression, etc.)
 - Did each student involved cooperate in the subsequent investigation?
- 9, Upon completion of this evaluation, the principal or his designee, shall administer the proper disciplinary action in accordance with the St. Charles Parish School Handbook.
- 10, If the principal, or his designee determines that the disturbance/fight has disrupted a proper safe school setting and/or learning environment, he/she shall contact the St. Charles Sheriffs Office and request the violator(s) be arrested for Disturbing the Peace in accordance with the 29th Judicial District Violence Prevention policy.
- 11, Immediately upon finalizing all facts of the incident, the student's parent or guardian shall be notified and involved in further action.
- 12, The principal or his designee shall meet the student(s) parent or guardian in an attempt to resolve the conflict
- 13, In the event a disturbance/fight occurs between athletes during a recognized sporting contest where emotions are heightened and physical contact is inevitable, the head coach shall investigate the incident, notify the principal, and take disciplinary action considered necessary by the coaching staff and the recommendation of the LHSAA. This applies only to the sporting event itself. Disturbances taking place either before or after the sporting event shall be handled in accordance with this policy.

Arrest

Students who have been arrested in accordance with the St. Charles Parish Violence Prevention Program are ordered by the 29th Judicial District Courts to comply to the following:

Students are required to post a \$250.00 bond at the time of release. Students electing to enter the court's diversionary program will be assessed \$100.00 as a fee for reimbursement to the school system for the funding of the conflict resolution program. The remaining \$150.00 may be reimbursed only after the successful completion of the following:

- **Bond**
Proper posting of the entire bond. Students who can not afford to post the entire bond are allowed to pay \$25.00 per week until the full bond has been posted. Failure to post the entire amount results in removal from the court's diversionary program.
- **Conflict Resolution Class**
Attendance of two conflict resolution classes held at the St. Charles Parish Courthouse. Student's tardiness, participation in class, and failure to complete assigned homework will be reported to the Judge and this information will be included in the recommendation regarding the disposition of charges. These conflict resolution classes are taught by school counselors with the assistance of a resource officer. It is held at the Courthouse in the St. Charles Sheriffs Department conference room in order to separate the court consequence from school discipline.
- **Parent Participation**
Parent or guardian participation. A parent or guardian are required to accompany their child for the last thirty (30) minutes of the second Conflict Resolution Class.
- **Community Service**
Completion often (10) hours of court appointed community service work at a designated school campus. This is not a school consequences and is not optional. Students are required to arrive 15 minutes early and be prepared to work on school improvement projects
- **Court**
Court appearance.

Court Recommendation

The following three recommendations are available to the Violence Prevention Committee which is made up of the principal or designee, counselor, Resource Officer, and supervisor of the Community Service performed.

- Case dismissed, Bond refunded.
- Case accepted for pretrial intervention. Fighter ordered to ten or more hours of community service during which time the student would be required to perform various school improvement projects under the supervision of school personnel. Criminal charges refused.
- Case referred to Court for hearing on criminal charges. Sentenced by Judge as in any other criminal case. Including, but not limited to detention in a juvenile facility, community service, counseling, payment of restitution to victim, school, fines, etc.

Case Disposition

Within sixty (60) days following the date of incident, a recommendation form will be forwarded to the Courts detailing the students compliance of court's directions. If the student complies to all requirements, a recommendation for the return of the remainder of the bond will be forwarded to the Judge for his review. Failure to comply to the above requirements may result in forfeit of bond, additional community service hours, and/or both.

Suspension

Each student involved also will be suspended and/or expelled from school. The suspension or expulsion is appealable according to the school system's policy previously in effect. Law enforcement proceedings are not appealable through the school district.

School Resource Officer Program

Overview

The School Resource Officer concept is not new to law enforcement in America. The first full time program began in Flint, Michigan in the early fifties. Since its inception the concept of placing sworn law enforcement officers in school has grown, and now is effective in almost every state in the country. The triad approach of teacher, counselor, and law enforcement officer has been the most effective in changing the attitudes that young people have about law enforcement and its officers as well as the way that the law enforcement community views young people.

This triad approach has proven effective. The officer will assume the role of a resource teacher, reality counselor, and being the law enforcement officer on campus. The officer is not a school disciplinarian, but when a violation of school rules is also a violation of state law, the school administration and the officer work together to bring all the resources under their control to help serve the school and solve the problem. When acting as the counselor, the officer is not a replacement to the guidance counselor or

any other social service that may be in place in the school. They are, however, reality counselors. The officer will be available to talk to students, parents, teachers, and administration about problems that involve the criminal justice system. The officers also bring additional resources from the community into the school.

Because of their experience and their assignment the Resource Officer will have to talk with a young person when they need someone to make a positive difference in their lives. The officers are available to help young people and their families with situations that could become dangerous if not referred to the resources available to the community. It is the job of the school resource officer to know what is available in the community and how to make the referral.

In the classroom the Resource Officer brings a sense of reality and their experience to the students. The Resource Officer's presentations fit into the state adopted curricula being taught in every academic area. The Resource Officer can speak to government classes about search and seizure, health classes about drug and alcohol, math classes about traffic accident reconstruction, home economics classes about child abuse and domestic violence, and English classes about report writing. The only limits to where officers can have a positive impact in the classroom are the imagination of school staff and the officer. Most of the officers bring prepared list of lessons to their campus that they developed based on their training and experience. This freedom, individuality, and creativity are what makes the Resource Officer concept more effective than other school-based policing programs.

The officers are not told what they need to teach their students or how they must present the information. The officers are given freedom to create their own programs and teach the information that is needed in their area, their school, and by their students. The officers are also given the opportunity to use all resources at their disposal to better help the young people in their community. Officers are taught guidelines in the training and then allow to be creative and meet their students needs.

As the law enforcement influence on the school campus, the Resource Officer program allows the community to be more involved in their school. First, the officer's presence on the campus does not change the job of the school staff or administration. Their job continues to be the education of their students. However, the law enforcement officer, Resource Officer, will take over the job of policing the campus. As we know, a large percentage of school violence is initiated by non students coming onto campus and creating problems. The presence of a Resource Officer has an immediate positive impact on the problem of trespassers. These trouble makers are much less likely to come onto campus and confront a sworn law enforcement officer. The officer also has the resources of the law enforcement community to assist in the solving of problems that impact the school. These officers can, and do, interact with the court system, adult and juvenile probation and social services.

When the schools and community work together to create a safe and orderly education environment, young people feel safer and will be more inclined to learn. No one can teach or learn if they are afraid when they come to school. The Resource Officer, when properly trained and funded, will make a difference in the school. We believe that the Resource Officer is the finest example of true community oriented policing. When the

school, law enforcement, students and parents work together we can and will have an atmosphere where students feel safe to learn, teachers will feel secure enough to teach, and administrators will then be able to return to their chosen profession of educating our children.

Resource Officer's Job Description

The Resource Officer reports to the Principal or Designee at their assigned School. On days which are considered off days for the school and normal work days for the department, the Resource Officer reports to their supervisor in the Special Services Division.

While on school campus, the Resource Officer:

- Enforces the law in every situation in a fair and impartial manner.
- Takes appropriate action in instances when laws are violated.
- Coordinates all activities with the principal and staff prior to enacting any programs in the school
- Prepares a law related education curriculum and develops expertise in presenting lessons to students
- Makes himself available for conferences with students, parents, and faculty to assist with law enforcement or crime prevention problems.
- Becomes familiar with all community agencies which provide health and social services.
- Acts as a resource person to students, families, and faculty, making referrals to school officials when appropriate.
- Serves as a liaison with the Sheriffs Department regarding community affairs which may effect the school environment.
- Serves as the school-based contact for students who are on probation through court system.
- Takes actions against intruders who appear at school and related functions.
- Gives assistance to other police officers in matters regarding his school assignment.
- Makes the decision, in collaboration with the principal, to request additional police assistance, when necessary.

At the request of the principal, the Resource Officer:

- Assist in enforcing school rules, including monitoring student movement in the halls, checking student passes, and checking parking permits, etc.
- Attend faculty, parent, and community meetings to solicit support for and understanding of the program.
- Participates in the development of plans and strategies to prevent and/or minimize dangerous situations.
- Conduct formal interviews with students, adhering to police interview policies.
- Performs other duties appropriate to his role as a Resource Officer

Selection Process

Resource Officers who are assigned to St. Charles Parish Schools were selected through an interview process established by the St. Charles Sheriffs Department and St. Charles Parish School Board. The Sheriffs Department posted the job position and accepted letters of interest from members of the department who met the following minimum requirements:

- Possess a current P.O.S.T. Certificate with a minimum of two (2) years enforcement experience.
- Demonstrate an ability to teach law-related education in a classroom setting.
- Demonstrate an ability to work closely with school administrators.
- Willing to work extra duty for school-related activities at the principal's request.
- Agree not to schedule non-emergency leave-time while school is in session.

Officer Evaluation

Resource Officers are evaluated based on their effectiveness and compatibility by their immediate supervisor as well as through an evaluation filed by the school principal.

Funding

Funding for the Violence Prevention Program is provided by the school system with compensation for the Conflict Resolution classes and Community Service supervision from a portion of the bond forfeited as a condition of acceptance into pretrial intervention.

Resource Officers salaries are provided by the Sheriffs Department and the school system. The officer's salaries with benefits for the 180 school days are divided equally between both agencies.

In 1996, the St. Charles Parish Sheriffs Department applied for and received a block grant offered by the United States Department of Justice, Law Enforcement Block Grant. These funds were used for the expansion of the program from four (4) Resource Officers to its present six (6) officers. This has allowed the placement of a Resource Officer in all of the parish's high schools and middle schools. An additional two (2) officers will be added to the program as part of the ADAPT Program.

Statistical Data

The program was introduced into Destrehan and Hahnville High Schools at the open of the 1994/95 school year and immediately reduced reports of violent incidents. The program was introduced into the parish's four middle schools following the Thanksgiving Holidays that same year.

Below is the by school list identifying the reduction in school violence this school year as compared to this same period in 1993/1994 school year.

Destrehan High School	74 Percent Decrease
Hahnville High School	77 Percent Decrease
J.B. Martin Middle School	70 Percent Decrease
Eual J. Landry Middle School	38 Percent Decrease
Albert Cammon Middle School	32 Percent Decrease
Harry Hurst Middle School	32 Percent Decrease

Conclusion

By building trust that there is a genuine common goal with the community and parents to insure a good foundation for the development of the young people of this parish. Also, to build a relationship with the entities of the program and the community. Through the adoption of this problem-solving effort has allowed yielded the following benefits:

- Reduction in violent acts in the schools.
- The ability for the schools to educate in a safe productive environment.

- The ability of students to avoid conflict by using the concepts taught through the program.
- The interaction of the youth to communicate with authority figures.
- The program serves a deterrent to drugs and other criminal activity that otherwise effect the school process.

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The quality of life has been effected in the community as a result of this problem-solving effort by:

- The quality of life has students, teachers, and administrators regaining a sense of safety in the school climate.
- Students gain knowledge of the laws and understand the proper way to handle conflicts in violent situations.
- Administrators are given another alternative to comply with in handling other violent situations and other criminal activity that may occur in schools.
- Students can maintain dignity and not be subject to as much group pressure and not be at risk of bullies in the school.



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