

The Arlington, Texas Police Department  
Presents

**P.A.C.T.**

.Partners Against Chronic  
Truancy



**2001 Herman Goldstein Award  
for  
Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing**

The Arlington, Texas Police Department Presents:



***Partners Against Chronic Truancy***

**Summary**\_\_\_\_\_

Partners Against Chronic Truancy - P.A.C.T. is the result of a joint endeavor between the Arlington Police Department and the Arlington Independent School District to define and address the issue of student truancy and non-attendance. Utilizing the S.A.R.A. model of problem solving, the goal of the project was to clearly define the problem of truancy and non-attendance as it relates to crime / public disorder, effects on the school environment, and impact to the surrounding community, then develop effective intervention strategies to address the problem.

**Scanning**

The scanning phase was conducted beginning in May 1997. It was determined through School Resource Officer informal surveys, meetings with school officials, and an increase in complaint calls to both the police department and the school district that truancy and student non-attendance was adversely affecting the community and school environment.

In joint agreement, it was determined that the Arlington Police Department and the Arlington Independent School District would collaborate in a problem-solving project to address the issue of truancy as it relates to crime and public disorder.

**Analysis**

The analysis phase was conducted during the 1998-99 school year. In order to clearly define the problem, information and data was gathered from various sources, both traditional and non-traditional. Through extensive data analysis, it was determined that a correlation does exist between truant behavior and crime/public disorder. A comprehensive picture of truancy in the community was developed.

### ***Response***

Utilizing the information obtained during the analysis phase regarding truancy, a comprehensive, multi-faceted response was developed. The P. A.C.T., consisting of several major components, was implemented. The major components include the Business Education Program, the Home Visit Program, and the Police Officer Stop and Identify program. Coupled with specific procedural changes and in-school programs developed by the Arlington Independent School District, the P.A.C.T. program realized full implementation during the 1999-2000 school year.

### ***Assessment***

Near the completion of the 1999-2000 school year, a full assessment of the P.A.C.T. program was conducted. The assessment phase consisted of a full replication of the analysis phase. Significant positive results were shown including a 2.09% increase in student attendance and a 25% decrease in selected offenses in the neighborhood, business, and community areas. Overall, students, teachers, and community stakeholders reported a decreased level of fear of being victimized by truant and non-attending students.

Currently, P.A.C.T. has been implemented within the entire City of Arlington and in all high school clusters of the Arlington Independent School District. A complete program description follows.



## *Partners Against Chronic Truancy*

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**Partners Against Chronic Truancy Project Description** is a direct result of the 1998 School-Based Partnership program through the United States Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. Truancy is one of the critical issues facing youth today. It is considered a gateway crime and, for many juveniles, is the first criminal offense committed. In an effort to combat this issue, the Arlington Police Department and the Arlington Independent School District developed and implemented **P.A.C.T.**

Utilizing the SARA model of problem solving, the overall goal of the project was to clearly define the problem of truancy and student non-attendance with regards to its affect on the school environment and the surrounding community, then develop effective intervention strategies to address the problem. The following outlines and describes development of the **P.A.C.T.** program through the stages of the SARA model.

### SCANNING

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The nature of the problem initially identified was student truancy and its effect on the community and the school environment.

- **Problem Identification**

The problem was identified utilizing various sources of input. During the 1996-97 school year, it was recognized by the Arlington Independent School District and the Arlington Police Department that the issue of truancy and student non-attendance was growing, particularly at one of the five (5) high school campuses - Sam Houston High School.

During the 1996-97 school year, the daily attendance rate at Sam Houston High School (SHHS) dropped to a district low of 89%. This was the first time that any school had dropped below at least a 90% average daily attendance rate. In addition, the number of

complaint calls received by the police department regarding groups of juveniles "hanging out" around local businesses adjacent to SHHS began to increase. Local business owners also called the administrative staff of SHHS to complain about students out of school during normal school hours. Complaints included such problems as loitering, graffiti / criminal mischief, fights, and loud disturbances.

In May 1997, an informal survey was taken utilizing the School Resource Unit of the Arlington Police Department. The officers were asked to identify the number one growing problem facing the school environment and the School Resource Unit. In a vote of 10-0, the officers identified the issue of truancy as the number one issue to be addressed. In addition, school administrators, particularly those associated with Sam Houston High School, indicated with urgency the need to address the growing problem of truancy and student non-attendance.

Additionally, a brief review of current literature regarding truancy as it relates to crime and delinquency was conducted.

- **Initial Level of Diagnosis**

Based on preliminary analysis of basic data, anecdotal information from school administrators and officers, and interviews with local business owners/managers, the issues of student truancy / non-attendance as it relates to crime and public disorder was chosen as the focus of this SARA project.

In order to adequately address the problem, the unit of analysis was limited to Sam Houston High School and the immediately surrounding community.

## **ANALYSIS**

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In order to clearly define and assess the problem of student truancy as it relates to crime and public disorder, information and data was collected from a variety of traditional and non-traditional sources. All analysis information was collected during the 1998-99 school year. The

nature of the analysis was exploratory seeking to develop a clearer understanding of the problem.

- Data Collection

The first step in the analysis phase was to identify the primary stakeholders in the problem. Stakeholders were identified as:

- Students
- Faculty
- Neighborhood Residents
- Local Business Owners/Operators
- Police

Sources of information and methods of collecting the data were then developed and data collection began in September 1998.

| <b>Traditional Data Sources</b>   | <b>Non-Traditional Data Sources</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| - Calls for Police Service        | Y Student and Faculty Surveys       |
| Campus Crime Information          | Y Student and Faculty Focus Groups  |
| - School District Attendance Data | Y Neighborhood/Community Interviews |
| Truancy Court Case Data           | Y Business Surveys                  |
| Y Demographic Information         | Y Parent Interview                  |

Surveys were distributed to SHHS students and faculty. Focus groups discussions were conducted with truant students, non-truant students, faculty, and staff. Interviews were conducted with neighborhood residents and local business owners/managers within a one-mile radius from the school. Finally, Police Department calls for service data within the defined beat containing the school, campus crime statistics, and attendance data was collected for comparison to information obtained through the surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

- Data Analysis

From the above sources of information and data collection methods, a large amount of information was collected for analysis. A triangulation method of analysis was utilized allowing for correlations to be recognized and specific conclusions drawn. Upon complete analysis, it

was determined that there appeared to a definitive link between student truancy/non-attendance and crime and perceived public disorder.

- Results

Through the student surveys and focus groups, interesting information was discovered regarding student behavior. 59% of the students who responded indicated that they had skipped school at least one time, while more than 18% indicated they had skipped more than 4 times throughout the school year. In addition, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students reported the highest rate of non-attendance. 56.7% of all students indicated that the reason that students skip school is because "it is easy to get away with."

Students also reported a variety of activities while skipping school:

|                                 |       |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| Stay at a Friend's House        | 39.7% |
| Stay at Home                    | 37.4% |
| Consume Alcohol                 | 14.0% |
| Use Drugs/Marijuana             | 14.4% |
| Hanging out at Local Businesses | 16.7% |
| Vehicle Burglaries              | 4.2%  |
| Residential Burglaries          | 2.8%  |
| Gambling                        | 5.4%  |
| Vandalism/Graffiti              | 7.7%  |
| Selling Illegal Drugs           | 4.2%  |

Content analysis of the focus groups information confirmed the survey results and provided further explanatory information regarding student behavior.

The faculty survey indicated that more than 70% of the faculty respondents felt that students that skip class create problems for the school. More than 70% indicated a fear of being victims of crime from truants in the form of stealing or damaging their private property. More than 45% of the respondents indicated that they had knowledge of criminal activity by one of their own truant students. The faculty focus groups strengthened and expanded on this information.

Through interviews conducted with neighborhood residents and local business owner/managers, it was reported that a perceived sense of public disorder existed because of the truant students. The business representatives indicated that the students "hanging out" around their businesses during school hours had adversely affected their business. Several reported being victims of crime believed to be committed by truant students such as theft and graffiti/ and vandalism. In addition, a sense of fear of being victims of crime and retaliation from the truants for reporting criminal behavior was indicated. Interviews with neighborhood residents resulted in information consistent with that obtained from the business representatives.

In-home interviews were also conducted with parents of chronically truant students. More than 160 home visits were conducted by school resource officers and school officials. Parents reported a variety of reasons as to why their children were truant from school. A general sense of frustration with the students was reported. In addition, many indicated that they did not know what to do or who to call for assistance with the problem.

Police calls for service, campus crime data, and attendance data were analyzed and compared to the information received from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups. In summary, the type of offenses reported, call responses indicated, and attendance rates reported were consistent with the information obtained through the survey/interview information.

It was also determined that the geographic profile of the area also contributed to the problem of truancy. Businesses such as fast-food restaurants and convenience stores within walking distance from the school were an attraction to skipping and truant students. Sam Houston High School has approximately 20 businesses of this type within a one-mile radius of the campus.

Upon completion of analysis of all of the various sources of data, a comprehensive picture of truancy as it relates to crime and public disorder was drawn. Very simply, it was determined that a correlation did exist between truancy and crime/public disorder and specific responses based on the information obtained should be developed and implemented.

## RESPONSE

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Based on the information obtained from the analysis phase of the project, a multi-phase response, entitled P.A.C.T., was jointly developed and implemented by the Arlington Police Department and the Arlington Independent School District. The base components of **P.A.C.T** were initially implemented during the 1998-99 school year (August - May). The following outlines the major components of the **P.A.C.T.** program.

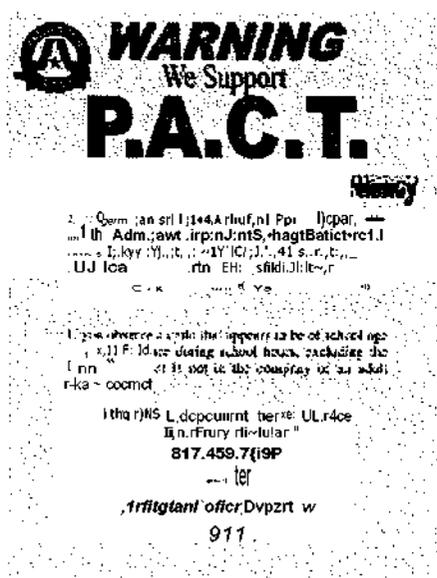
- **Arlington Police Department**

The Arlington Police Department implemented several programs and procedural changes designed to combat student truancy and the resulting crime and public disorder.

- **Business Education Program**

In conjunction with the AISD, the police department implemented the Business Education Program with local businesses adjacent to SHHS. The program was designed to educate business owners and managers about the problem of truancy and encourage community involvement in combating the problem.

Twenty-two businesses were initially contacted to participate in the program. Each of the businesses contacted agreed to participate by displaying P.A.C.T. posters in visible areas and contacting APD or AISD if students were observed loitering or hanging around businesses during normal school hours.



## Stop and Identify Program

Patrol officers assigned to the area adjacent to SHHS began "stopping and identifying" students who were found to be out of school during normal school hours. Officers were instructed to attempt to identify students and determine the student's status. If determined to be skipping school, officers were asked to return the student(s) to the campus and complete a "Truant Interview Card". The information obtained was forwarded to the appropriate school official for follow-up. From January 1999- May 1999, more that 40 students were *Stopped and Identified*.

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- **Arlington Independent School District and Sam Houston High School**

Based on the high number of student responses indicating that it is "easy to skip school" and that "nobody cared if they skipped", Sam Houston High School Administrative staff made several procedural changes to combat this issue.

- **Teacher Calling Procedures**

Each faculty member assigned to the school was issued a telephone for his/her classroom. With this telephone availability, each teacher was instructed to call the home of every student with an unexcused absence every *class* period. This was a change from the one-time a day call to the home.

### **Isolated Lunch Period for Freshman and Sophomore Students**

*Given the data that indicated that the largest population of skippers were 9th graders, SHHS created a closed campus lunch for freshman and sophomore students. No student was allowed to leave during this lunch period unless accompanied by a parent /faculty member. This allowed for strict monitoring of students at risk for truancy/skipping who would leave campus for lunch and not return to class. Teachers were given specific lunch duty assignments along with campus security officers.*

### **Tardy Sweeps**

School administrative staff, teachers, and campus security officers conducted a series of random tardy sweeps to ensure that all students were in the classroom during class hours. These sweeps were and continue to be conducted weekly. In addition, campus security staff members were instructed to monitor all exit doors during class hours through use of the campus CCTV system and visual observation by security personnel. Any student attempting to leave campus during scheduled class hours were escorted to the appropriate administrative staff for disposition.

### **Increased Awareness and Focus on Truancy Problem**

School administrators conducted several meetings with school faculty, student groups, and staff to address the issue of truancy and skipping and increase awareness of the problem. Teachers were encouraged to report any observed truant and/or criminal behavior to the campus SRO immediately.

- **Joint AISD / API) Project Components**

AISD and APD jointly implemented specific program components.

- **Home Visits**

While specifically conducted as part of the Analysis phase of the project, the Home Visits conducted by police officers and AISD attendance officers were also response in nature. While the visits were designed to gather information about truancy and the needs of parents and students in overcoming the problem, the visits also were utilized to provide assistance to parents/family attempting to address truancy problems.

Police Officers and Attendance Officers conducted more than 160 home visits to SHHS students and parents during March 2000 - May 2000. Informational pamphlets were provided to parents regarding social service agencies available to provide assistance with various issues or needs (See Attached).

## ASSESSMENT

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The assessment phase of the project was conducted during the 1999-2000 school year. This was the first full school year following the implementation of all P.A.C.T. responses. The assessment consisted of a complete replication of the analysis phase. The same information (traditional and non-traditional) was collected utilizing the same data collection methods. All data was collected by May 2000 and compiled information was compared to the baseline data collected during the analysis.

Upon comparative assessment, it was shown that P.A.C.T. had a very significant positive impact on the issue of truancy and related crime and public disorder. The most significant results are summarized below.

### Increase in Student Attendance

Student attendance at Sam Houston High School averaged 92.76% for the 1999-2000 school year. This was an increase of 2.09% over the 1998-99 school year.

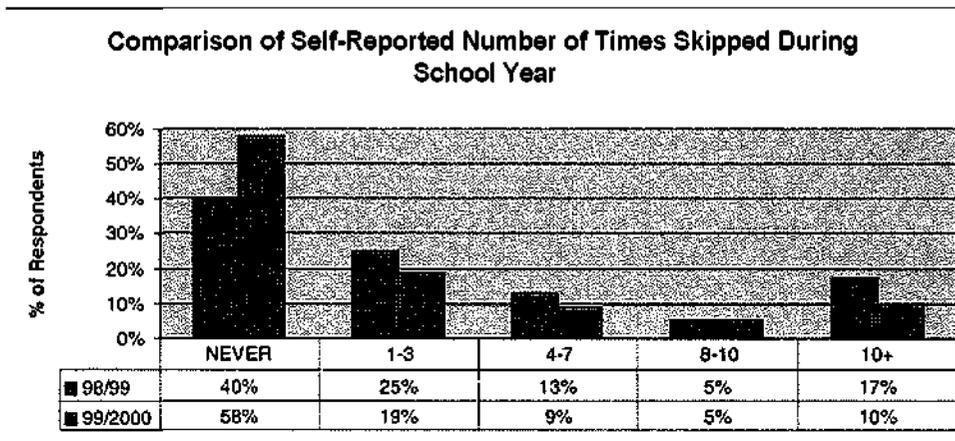
| SIX WEEKS | 1st   | 2nd   | 3rd   | 4th   | 5th   | 6th    | TOTAL |
|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| 91.88     | 90.67 | 90.56 | 89.85 | 90.46 | 90.62 | 90.67% |       |
| 93.03     | 93.32 | 92.74 | 91.03 | 92.61 | 93.85 | 92.76% |       |
| +1.15     | +2.65 | +2.18 | +1.18 | +2.15 | +3.23 | +2.09% |       |

This marked the largest increase in average yearly attendance in the last five years.

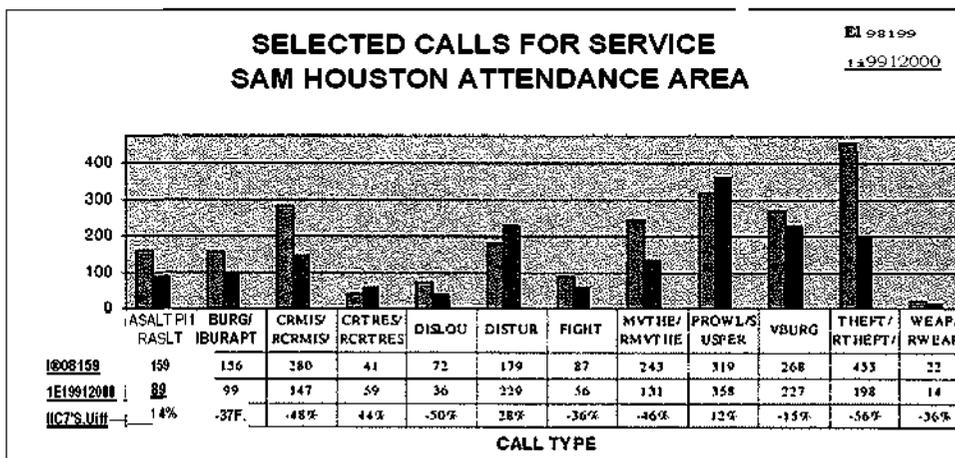
In addition, fewer students reported skipping than previously indicated.

### Reduction in Crime and Disorder in the Community

Upon analysis of police calls for service data, a complete comparison was made

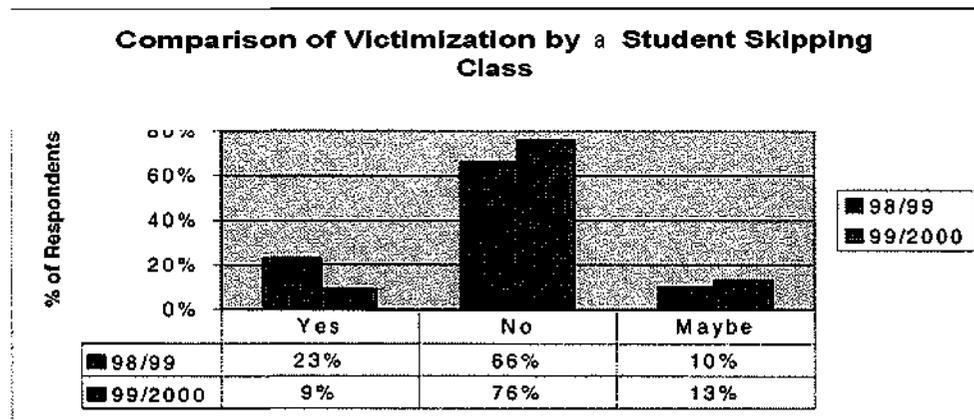
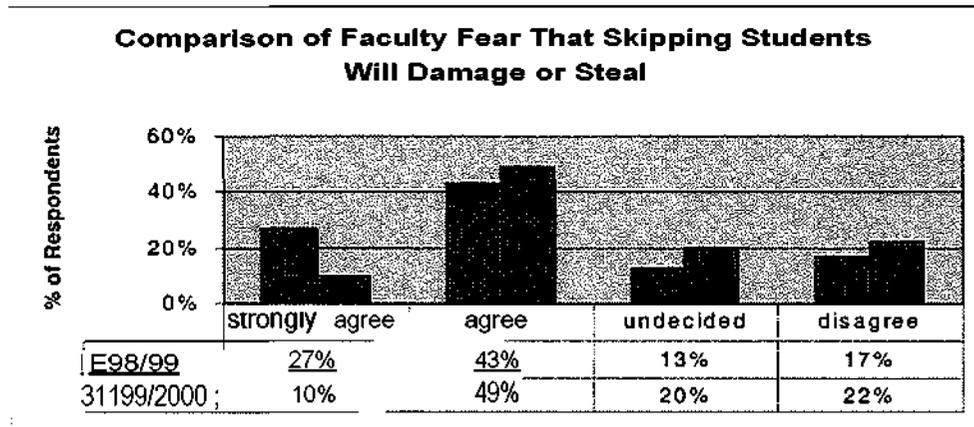


between selected offenses that occurred only on school days, during school hours. Overall, there was 25% reduction in selected calls with a more than 50% reduction in certain call types. Conversely, there was an expected increase in such call types as disturbances and suspicious persons. This increase was expected due to the heightened awareness of the problem and the request by the police and school officials for truant students to be reported.



- **Reduction of Fear Levels**

Students, faculty, and community stakeholders all reported a reduced level of fear after the implementation of P.A.C.T.



Interviews conducted with business owners/managers indicated an increased level of satisfaction and decreased levels of fear of victimization from truant students. They also reported a 56% decrease in offenses committed against them or their property.

Additional information obtained from assessment data indicated that the students no longer felt that the number one reason for skipping was "that it is easy to do." Students, through surveys and focus groups, offered a wider range of reasons for skipping school but indicated that the

increased attention from teachers, parents, police, business owners, and neighborhood residents has affected their decision whether or not to skip school.

Full assessment of the program on an annual basis will continue and adjustments will be made as needed.

### **Current Program Status**

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In May 2000, the recommendation was made to extend the major components of **P.A.C.T.** city and school district wide. This recommendation expanded the program to include all five (5) high schools and their feeder schools, the city-wide business community, all departmental police officers, and the Arlington community as a whole would be asked to address this issue. The recommendation was made to the chief administrative staffs of both the Arlington Police Department and the Arlington Independent School District. The recommended expansion of the program was based on the positive results of the Sam Houston High School project. Both entities supported the recommendation for city-wide implementation and agreed to continue the problem-solving partnership.

During the first semester of the 2000-2001 school year, city-wide implementation was completed. More than 130 local businesses agreed to become partners against the truancy problem, AISD employed an additional 3 attendance officers assigning one to each high school area, and the Stop and Identify program became official department procedure for all officers. Finally, SRO's and AISD attendance officers conducted more than 250 home visits to parents of chronically truant students.

P.A.C.T. has been featured in several publications and has been designated as a model program. It was listed in the May 2000 Texas Attorney General's School Violence Prevention Task Force as well as the Autumn 2000 Texas Regional Community Policing Institute Quarterly Report.

## AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

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- **Organization Commitment to P.A.C.T.**

The Arlington Police Department is dedicated to the concept of problem-oriented policing. The department currently operates under a geographic policing model that empowers officers to seek solutions to problems in their assigned geographic areas as well as holds them accountable for building partnerships with stakeholders in the problem-solving process.

**P.A.C.T.** was initially implemented primarily at the School Resource Officer level. Since the city-wide implementation of the program, P.A.C.T. has seen strong support from police department administration to patrol officers working around the various school campuses. The program fits well within the geographic policing model and adheres to the goals and objectives of the department.

- **Training**

Information regarding P.A.C.T. was distributed to all members of the police department. Specific training was given to all officers upon the implementation of the Stop and Identify program. In addition, information was disseminated to all officers regarding truancy and its impact on the community.

- **Problems**

The only problem experienced with the development and implementation of P.A.C.T. was the complex nature of the problem addressed. There are numerous causes of truant behavior including cultural barriers, learning issues, crime involvement, boredom, and home and financial problems. Deciding on a direction for the project that would have the greatest impact on the issue proved to be difficult.

P.A.C.T. is routinely assessed for its continued positive impact on truancy and the community and changes are made as needed.

- **General Resources**

Analysis, response, and assessment phases were conducted completed by the project Research Analyst, Debra Carney. Lieutenant Lisa Womack was designated Project Director and responsible for program supervision.

Awarded grant funding through the School-Based Partnership Program of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing was utilized to complete the initial project. Major program components were completed utilizing existing police personnel, school district staff, citizens, and students.

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