

# School Impact Project 2000 Dorchester High School



*Submission for*  
2001 Herman Goldstein Award

*Submitted by*  
Boston Police Department

May 1,2001

## Summary

The Boston Police Department, led by supervisors and officers at the level of our Schools Unit and in collaboration with faculty, teachers, students and other stakeholders, developed a systematic response to restoring order and safety in Boston's most troubled schools. The School Impact Project grew out of a crisis in the city's most troubled school, Dorchester High School.

For several years, criminal incidents in public schools were kept from the attention *of Boston police*. By the middle of 1999-2000 school year, the problems inside Dorchester High flared entirely out of the control of teachers, students and administrators. A desperate headmaster bucked convention and reached out to the Department's small Schools Unit.

Based on the initial scan, the unit convened more players. These included staff from the district attorney, juvenile corrections, probation and the public schools unarmed safety officers. They also brought in police social workers faith-based community leaders. Their analysis *of the* problem yielded two main courses of action. In the short term, basic order had to be restored, led by police. In the longer term, the headmaster, staff, faculty and students had to be supported in their effort to restore the school's code of conduct and maintain Dorchester High as a safe and nurturing learning and teaching environment. The response was crafted based on this analysis. It went into effect on the day before spring vacation.

At an assembly students were told by representatives of the collaborative that everyone would be working together to transform Dorchester into a safe and effective school. The steps to be taken included:

- Home visits by clergy and police.
- Installation of metal detectors.
- Dialogue between students and police.

Within a few short weeks the violence all but disappeared, as indicated in the statistics listed in the Assessment section. It serves as the model for saving troubled schools.

## School Impact Project at Dorchester High School

### A. SCANNING

School violence came to the attention of police when the problems facing one particular high school, Dorchester High, reached crisis levels during the 1999-2000 *year*. While streets were now safer, in large part due the earlier successes of collaborative intervention strategies such as Operation Ceasefire, the violence seemed to be persisting in the schools, with Dorchester High school now openly becoming an unsafe place for students.

Dorchester High in fact had been experiencing violence and criminal activity within its walls for many years. Violence and lack of control at Dorchester High had been a recurring theme, but it was obscured by a School Department reluctant to admit the severity of the problem. For over two years the school received resources and funds from the School Department in an attempt to improve the learning environment and regain control. Despite these efforts the violence and lack of control only continued with the ever-prominent threat of shutdown.

By early 2000, Dorchester High was facing a spate of severe violent incidents which threatened the safety of students and staff. Given their seriousness, these incidents were increasingly coming to the attention of the Boston Police Department. The situation by late 1999/early 2000 reached a crisis point that forced school administration to finally admit and accept the problem. Most importantly it prompted the call for focused police intervention.

The scan showed the incidents to be typically gang-related and drug-related, with students being stabbed and shot at, in and out of school. School Safety Police Officers<sup>1</sup>, a non-BPD patrol force hired by Boston Public Schools, were also being seriously attacked. The violent incidents led to calls by community leaders to shut down Dorchester High. The level of fear among the students was extremely high, exacerbated by the breakdown in basic order. One student described the situation: *"Its scaly<sup>hear</sup> School should be a safe place and its not hera Immerrrus Lots of people are."*

The series of specific incidents that triggered the call for immediate intervention included:

- > 10/13/99 - A School Safety Police Officer is assaulted by a student and suffers serious head injury
- 10/21/99 -A student is stabbed outside the school during dismissal
- r 11/2/99 - Tensions are very high as a result of the discovery of the body of missing student, Chaunte Jones - found stabbed to death.
- â1 1/3/99 -A student is shot while entering school in the morning. Victim is also in possession of a firearm
- e' 2/7/00 -A student is pistol whipped inside the school

Students themselves perceived that gang activity and drug dealing were commonplace. At **this point the level** of fear among students and faculty was higher than ever. (See attached newspaper articles on violent incidents at Dorchester High - Attachments.)

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<sup>1</sup> Boston Public School Safety Police Force (BPS School Safety Police) are hired by the Boston Public schools to partol and secure schools, and distinct from Boston Police Department School Police Unit (BPD School Police)

## B. ANALYSIS

The principal of Dorchester High, Robert Belle, his staff, and members from Superintendent of Schools Tom Payzant's staff, met with Sergeant Detective Paul Fitzgerald, the Boston Police School Police Unit Coordinator and other Boston Police officials and agreed that the school administration would work with the Boston Police to assess the problem and implement a plan immediately. An Intervention Team was convened whose members were identified by Boston Police and School Administrators as being the primary stakeholders in the school. This team in addition to the school administration, consisted of representatives from:

- Boston Police School Police Unit, BPS School Safety officers, Boston Municipal Police, MBTA Police
- Dorchester High School Faculty
- Probation Officers
- Department of Youth Services
- Boston Street Workers Program
- Members of local faith-based organizations
- Suffolk County District Attorney's office
- Youth Service Providers Network (Boston police social workers)

The Intervention Team began by analyzing the incidents and underlying problems at the school. Most of the analysis revolved around criminal incident reports by all the relevant parties closest to the problem and problem-students.

Boston Police Department's Office of Research and Evaluation collated the data on the incidents at Dorchester High between October 1999 and January 2000. The results were as follows:

Incidents at Dorchester High October 1999- January 2000 (four month period):

- Recovered Weapons: 38
- False Fire Alarms: 28

- Robbery: 13
- Assault and Battery: 25

The time frame for analysis was expedited given that Dorchester High School was in serious trouble. The sense of immediacy in developing and enacting an intervention plan was predominant. Having a history of collaboration and partnership, the Boston Police were able to call relevant partners to the table and be confident that they would respond to the problem immediately. The discussion was therefore able to be very open and candid allowing a focused analysis of the problem in a timely manner.

The sharing of information among the Intervention Team, on the actual students involved in the majority of incidents at the school, revealed that many of the agencies involved, in their various capacities were already working with the same group of kids. Whether it was as the police officer, probation officer, or DYS caseworkers, the main troublemakers were known by multiple agencies. The Intervention Team's analysis found that it was the small group of disruptive students who were creating the majority of the school's problems. Collaboration and information sharing on many fronts became a first step in the problem solving process.

Specifically, the Intervention Team found that Dorchester High had a large number of students who were probationers and who, as a condition of their probation, had to attend school. Furthermore, Dorchester High had received more DYS-involved youth than any other school. A high percentage of DYS recently-released youth sent to Dorchester High were considered violent and dangerous. In October 2000, an estimated 85 students were on

court-ordered probation or in the custody of DYS. This was a 183% increase from 1998 when approximately 30 students at the school annually had served time at DYS.

Intervention team discussions also revealed that those students on probation, though very disruptive and disrespectful to police and teachers, avoided their probation officers as any violations (suspected violation allows immediate search/drug test) would revoke their liberty and send them to prison. This is certainly a more severe outcome than the often long and drawn out school administration hearing process. Therefore a significant role for probation and DYS supervisors was identified for this initiative.

A major problem identified by the Intervention Team was a total lack of adherence to school rules. The Intervention Team found that Dorchester High had a strict code of conduct which had been completely disregarded over the previous few years. The team then decided that the project would ultimately aim to restore the rules of the school and enforce the entire code of conduct, and thereby regain control to maintain a safe environment for learning. The appearance of the school and the tardiness of students also had to be turned around to show a respect for the school and its rules. Along the lines of George Kelling's "Broken Windows" theory, the buildings had to be cleaned and the smaller rules enforced to send a clear message that the administration intended to maintain order.

As far as academic achievement was concerned, Dorchester High was faring poorly. Only 1% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders at Dorchester High were found to be proficient on City wide grade level math tests. Only 30 ninth-graders chose to attend the school in 1997 — the city's most under-chosen high school, with the majority of enrolled students unwilling to be there. With the focus on trying to maintain minimum levels of discipline, teachers had difficulty in

ensuring that learning was occurring. Moreover, in 1999 Dorchester High School lost its accreditation.

Further Intervention Team discussions focusing on faculty and school administration found that principals often have difficulty in expelling youth immediately. This made the exercise of discipline more difficult and therefore less effective. Teachers also reported a sense of secondary victimization because of the lack of support from school administration.

### C. RESPONSE

As a result of the analysis of the problems and students of Dorchester High the agencies that were a part of the Intervention Team discussed what each agency could contribute in an effort to create a safe environment, and to maintain that commitment through the school year. They also reached out to other agencies identified as being able to contribute strongly to the Intervention Plan.

The main goals that the Intervention Team were 1) to create a safe school environment, and 2) to enforce the school rules as outlined in the school code of conduct, and 3) to maintain that safe environment for learning.

The Intervention Team not only collaborated with other law enforcement agencies but also partnered closely with community groups who had already been working with students at Dorchester High. Open partnership with the community was key to not only providing credibility to the initiative but also to the successful operation of the initiative. The Boston Ten Point Coalition has a strong standing in the communities in which most Dorchester High students reside. The clergy have influence amongst both parents and students, therefore their decision to stand by law enforcement as well as actively participate

in the initiative provided a certain community credibility to it. Likewise, the Streetworkers group who work with at-risk youth on the streets also are the most likely to gain student trust and respect. This also helped the initiative to succeed.

The following objectives and subsequent action plans were decided upon in order to achieve those goals:

1. Create safe environment
  - Increased police presence in and around school
  - Metal Detectors
  - Enforcement of school Code of Conduct and Rules
2. Consequences for violation of rules and criminal activity
  - Immediate expulsions and identification of problem students
  - Fast track prosecution
  - Probation and DYS caseworker presence
3. Prevention Activity
  - Outreach and service provision by clergy, social workers, streetworkers in school
  - Home visits
4. Interagency Communication
  - School Safety Coordinator
  - Intervention Team

The following agencies and community groups in addition to the Intervention Team committed to a collaborative effort in achieving the outlined goals by contributing to the action plan in a specific capacity.

- Boston Police School Police Unit Coordinator - Sgt. Det. Paul Fitzgerald
- Boston Public Schools School Safety Police
- Boston Police Department's Youth Violence Strike Force
- Boston Police Department District 3
- META Police
- Boston Police Department District 11
- Boston Municipal Police
- Suffolk County District Attorneys Office
- Dorchester High School Administration and Faculty

- Boston Ten Point Coalition
- Youth Service Providers Network
- Boston Streetworkers
- Department of Youth Services
- Dorchester Court Probation

Once the plan was established and agency and community roles identified, Headmaster of Dorchester High, Robert Belle, announced to students at assembly, as well as sent letters to parents, the new initiative that was underway. Members of the various agencies led by Sgt. Fitzgerald also addressed the entire student body with a unified message of non-tolerance towards violence and disruption, with a strong message on consequences. Each agency presented to the students their role in the initiative. The agency representatives, with Sgt. Fitzgerald, then met with school faculty to lay out the specific details of the intervention plan. The faculty were also asked to play a significant role in supporting the plan. Once Dorchester High was restored to a safe environment, more of the enforcement activity would be handed over to faculty from police.

Implementation of the Intervention plan began in February of 2000, and is detailed below.

#### I. *Conte a Safe Environment*

A sense of immediacy surrounding the entire initiative resulted in identifying a need for increased police presence to ensure safety of students and staff. The installation of metal detectors was also implemented to stop the entry of weapons of any kind into the school.

#### *Coordinated and Increased Police Presence*

The number of *BPS School Safety Police* was increased with an extra officer being assigned to Dorchester High, as well as an increase in the BPS School Safety Police Sergeant's time spent on Dorchester High. BPS also added a paraprofessional to the front door for additional security and for operation of metal detectors. The Boston Police Youth Violence Strike Force (YVSF) concentrated their patrols in and around the Dorchester High School area. *They* also decided to conduct periodic visits to the high school throughout the day to confer with the BPS School Safety Police officers to assess the day to day climate of the school. This allowed for any problems that arose to be dealt with immediately. These Detectives would therefore work closely with District level detectives in the Dorchester High area in any of their school-related investigations. Captain Ryans of *Boston Police* District B-3, the police district in which Dorchester High is located, also committed a visible uniformed presence daily at Dorchester High School. The B-3 Captain also committed to assigning a rapid response unit to the school at the commencement of dismissal times, as well as to have B-3's Anti-Crime Units available. Deputy Fleming of the *MBTA Police*, ensured his officers would monitor the train station by Dorchester High with an increased presence prior to and after school hours. He also ensured the alertness of officers on the bus routes to and from Dorchester High. Though Dorchester High is situated within the borders of District 3, Boston Police District C-11 was also often involved in activity involving the school, being the neighboring district where many students from Dorchester High reside. C-11 was made aware of the initiative and committed to watch for activity on adjacent streets that border B-3. *Boston* Municipal Police also offered to provide a visible presence at Roberts Field - a playground directly across from the Dorchester High parking lot. Officers would be at the field at the beginning and end of each school day.

### *Other- Enforrnazt Activity*

Boston Police K-9 unit would also conduct random certified sweeps of the school for drugs. School administrators would also conduct random locker searches aimed at removing any possibility of hidden firearms. School Administration required all staff and students to wear identification cards, and all guests had to be signed in with identification. A dress code was also instituted, that would not allow the wearing of certain colors that were perceived to be gang affiliated.

### *Installation of Metal Detectors*

Due to the number of incidents involving weapons at the school, ensuring weapons were not brought into the school was an immediate priority identified by the Intervention Team. In order to do this the school administration agreed to allow the installation of metal detectors at the front door of Dorchester High School. Hand-held metal detectors were also brought in for use by school administrators.

### 1. *Imrnediate Consequences*

#### *Identification of Problem Students and Immediate Expulsions*

Headmaster of Dorchester High School, Robert **Belle and his** staff identified the students that they knew to be most disruptive at the school and take steps necessary to either remove them from the school or gain their full cooperation in adhering to the rules of the school set by the school's code of conduct. Mr. Belle and his staff worked closely with the police in enforcing all school rules in order to send a clear message of not allowing disruptive students to encroach on the learning environment of other students.

*Fast Track PmSeJItion*

Suffolk County District Attorney's Office established a School Violence Prosecutor as well as a juvenile Rapid Indictment Prosecutor to focus on cases arising from Dorchester High as part of the initiative, and to ensure the validity of consequences to students who engage in violence.

*DYS and Probation Presence*

Dorchester Court Probation agreed to assign several probation officers to this initiative, both Adult and juvenile, which results in a probation officer being in the school all day every day. The officers have with them a list of their probationers that are students at the school and check *up* with them throughout the day. Department of Youth *Services* assigned a caseworker to Dorchester High School, from their facility (Angel Street) which oversees the students at the High School. The caseworkers attend school at certain critical times during the school day.

3. *Prevxtion Activity.*

*Outreach and Serra Provision to Students at School*

The clergy group, **Boston Ten Point Coalition** had for months prior been a visible presence at the school, and had instituted afterschool programs for at-risk youth at Dorchester High School. Boston Ten Point committed to the new initiative by continuing to reach out to disruptive youth as well as support law enforcement and high school administration efforts to enforce rules and maintain safety, as well as participate in home-visits to students (discussed below).

The Boston Police program known as the **Youth Service Providers Network**, a network of social workers in police districts, assigned a full time supervisory level social

worker from the YSPN program to work in partnership with the Headmaster in providing service referrals and counseling to problematic students at the school.

The Boston Streetworkers program works with at-risk youth on the streets, and as part of this intervention initiative, assigned a street worker to Dorchester High full time during school hours. The streetworker coordinated with the various agencies that had committed resources to the school to work with the identified students. Streetworkers have a certain "street" credibility with the youth, that other partners lack, and therefore have an "in" with the students.

#### *Home Visits — "Operation Home Front"*

On Thursday evenings, members of the Boston Ten Point Coalition, partnered with Youth Violence Strike Force Officers, BPS School Safety Police personnel, probation officers, and streetworkers for visits to the homes of problem students attending Dorchester High. The visits were done in groups of three with their purpose being to share information with the parents of the student about gangs, youth violence, and overall issues/pressures facing youth in the streets of the City.

#### *Building Maintenance*

e' Maintaining the school premises and buildings including the removal of any graffiti was also a priority.

#### 4. Interagency Communication and Coordination

##### Boston Police School Police Coordinator's Office

This office served as the strategic command center for the initiative. It was to be the repository for all the information and intelligence gathered during the operation. Sergeant Detective Paul Fitzgerald, acting as the overall commander for the intervention, and point of

contact for all Intervention Team members and other agencies involved, was responsible for coordinating team meetings and collecting information received from partner agencies. Sgt. Fitzgerald also forwarded his reports of activity within the school to the Office of the Police Commissioner as well as Boston Police Intelligence Unit to allow the coordinated response from police. Sgt. Fitzgerald also worked closely with Robert Belle of Dorchester High in identifying problem students and organizing home-visits.

#### D. ASSESSMENT

The results of the initiative became apparent very soon after the intervention strategies were put in place at Dorchester High School. Over the following weeks the school saw dramatic results. As each week passed the school began enforcing an additional rule stated in the code of conduct. For example, the "no hat policy" and no Walkman policy", as well as rules on tardiness were phased in. As the weeks went by the teachers and school administrators became more confident in enforcing rules knowing they had full support through direct response as needed from School Safety Police, the school principal and Boston Police. Also, administrators were actually effecting expedient expulsions when students committed offenses allowing expulsion.

Most assessments were made through discussions with students, teachers, school administrators and School Safety Police. Also incident reports were collected and analyzed by the Boston Police Department's Office of Research and Evaluation. They compared numbers of incidents prior to the initiative with those after. The results as shown in Figure 1 (Page 14), were dramatic. The total number of incidents at the school dropped from 104

FIGURE 1: Results of School Impact Project : Dorchester High School 2000.

Graph 1: Number of Offenses by Offense Type - Before and *After* Initiative

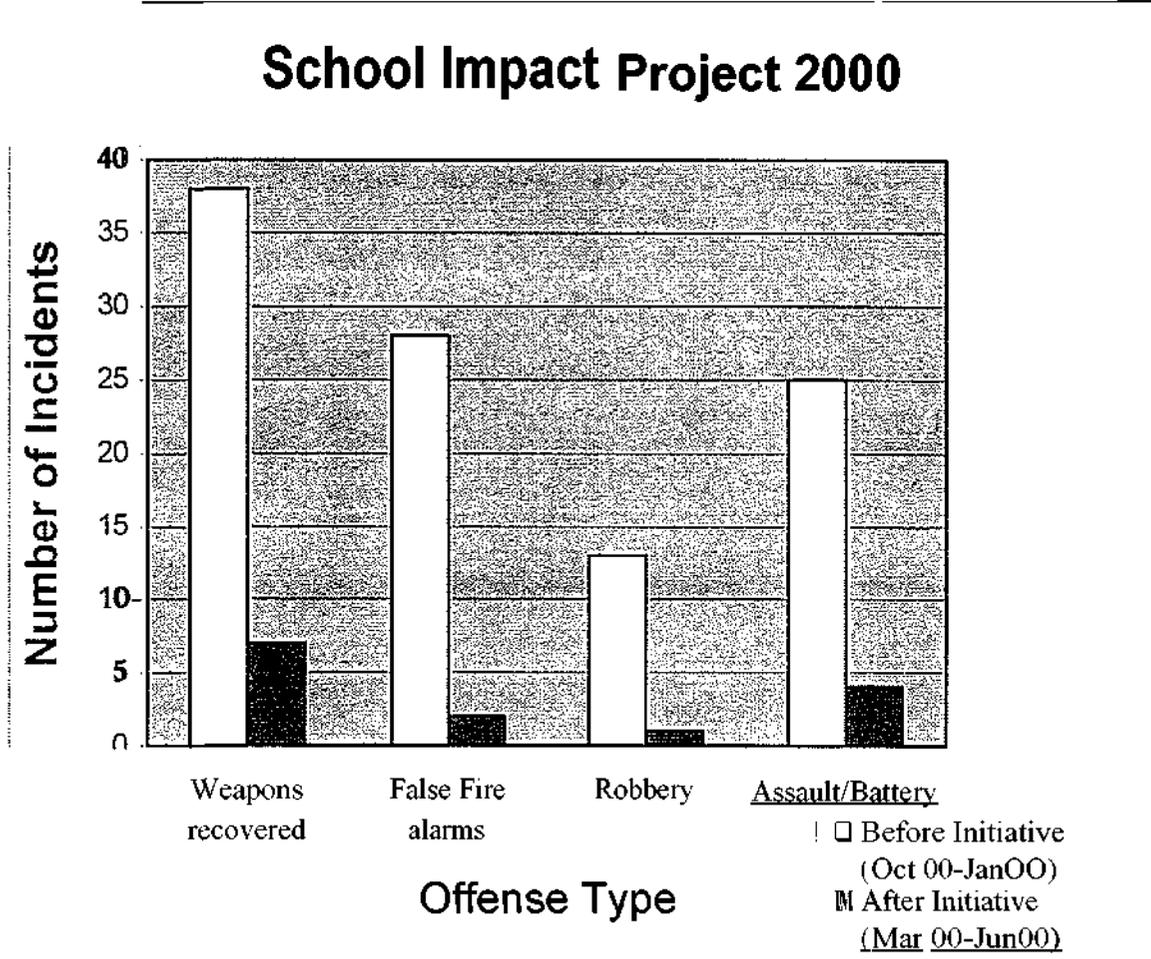


Table 1: Number of Offenses according to Offense Categories Before and After Initiative

	Before Initiative (Oct 00-Jan00)	After Initiative (Mar 00-Jun00)
Weapons recovered	38	7
False Fire alarms	28	2
Robbery	13	1
Assault/Battery	25	4

four months prior to implementation to just 14 incidents four months after the initiative - an 86.5% decrease in incidents

Interview-style discussions with students and teachers overwhelmingly showed a reduction of fear. They reported feeling safer and their levels of fear to have decreased significantly. Students also felt better about being at school.

The most difficulty was experienced at the on-set of intervention where the strategy had to be developed and tightened as gaps were exposed through which students could slip. For example, placement of metal detectors at the front doors did not account for students attempting to carry weapons through the side doors.

The other significant measure of success was the relationship established between the schools and Boston Police. Prior to this intervention, there was a reluctance on the part of the schools to utilize official police intervention. With the current existing relationship, any violence that occurs will draw immediate and coordinated responses, not only from police but also from community organizations. The Boston Police, from its past successes can bring to the table a myriad of partners, both from the community and other law enforcement agencies who are instrumental to successful intervention.

*With* the success at Dorchester High, the Boston Police School Safety Unit have coordinated with other Boston Public Schools, to establish similar initiatives. For example Sergeant Fitzgerald is now implementing a similar plan at Hyde Park *High* school. Other schools as a result of the Dorchester High success are reaching out to the Boston Police and opening the channels of communication. They are more open to admitting to problems within the schools and partnering with police to develop similar successful intervention and prevention strategies to keep their schools safe.

Prior to this initiative the Boston Police Unit devoted to schools was limited to one detective and one officer. Now, the School Police Unit of the Boston Police Department has grown to a force of 10 full-time officers.

The overall success of the initiative can be summed up through a statement by the Superintendent of Schools: "Safety **is no longer a concern at Dorchester High**".

### AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

Front-line Officer, Sergeant Detective Paul Fitzgerald heading the Boston Police School Safety Unit, being closest to the problem, took the lead in developing the solutions proposed in this initiative. He approached Headmaster Belle of Dorchester High with to offer police and partners to help intervene. He coordinated with other line-level officers of the Youth Violence Strike Force, as well as BPS School Safety Police and Municipal and MBTA police. The initiative has since been adopted city-wide. No training was received for this initiative. Officers were given recognition for the initiative by Police Commissioner Paul Evans and command staff, as well as City Leaders.

Guidelines officers used to manage the initiative were those set as examples during earlier projects such as Operation Cease-fire. General resources *came* in the form of increased personnel along all agency lines committed to Dorchester High.

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