

# SOUTH EUCLID POLICE DEPARTMENT

The South Euclid School  
Bullying Project

## Judge's Commentary

Each year the judges of the Goldstein Award look at dozens of deserving POP projects from around the world. Many have attributes that characterize quality problem-solving—clearly defined problems, partnerships, thorough analysis, tailor-made solutions, and shared responsibility for resolving problems. Only rarely do projects possess a majority of those attributes. The South Euclid (Ohio) School Bullying Project is one that does.

The first attribute one notices in this project is clarity. Problems in policing rarely appear in simple form. A clear definition of the problem's scope, and its interconnection to the broader community, is a necessary ingredient for successful results. In this case, project managers sought geographic clarity by focusing the problem of bullying at specific schools in the South Euclid/Lyndhurst School District. They obtained demographic clarity by focusing specifically on the 7th to 12th graders in their jurisdiction. They created a specified definition of "bullying" behavior. That definition became part of the school districts new bullying policy, was taught in student assemblies, and was included into student handbooks.

Another attribute is the way South Euclid officers obtained this clarity: the numerous, and varied, methods of analysis and response. The project planners used interviews, focus groups, surveys, mail-outs to parents, GIS mapping, and meetings with students and parents to achieve better understanding (and more effective resolution) of the problem. Partnerships were used extensively — an attribute that appears fre-

quently in problem-oriented policing.

Attention to tailor-made individual responses in a broader, more holistic, fashion is another attribute of successful projects. In South Euclid, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) -style, modifications were paired with better teacher supervision of "hotspots." Role-playing training for teachers in conflict resolution was paired with anti-bullying education for students and parents. Combining physical prevention with social and managerial prevention strategies is called "2nd Generation CPTED." It represents the most advanced form of crime prevention. The South Euclid project provides an excellent example.

Finally, the South Euclid project highlights what can happen when police share, in a fundamental way, their crime prevention mandate with others. It shows how three practitioners in three different professions—a police school resource officer (SRO), a social worker and a researcher from Kent State University—became champions for change and helped a school district and its community tackle bullying.

## Summary

**The Problem:** Unchecked disorderly behavior of students in South Euclid, Ohio led the school resource officer to review school data regarding referrals to the principal's office. He found that the high school reported thousands of referrals a year for bullying and the junior high school had recently experienced a 30 percent increase in referrals for bullying. Police data showed that juvenile complaints about disturbances, bullying, and assaults after school hours had increased 90 percent in the last 10 years.

**Analysis:** A researcher from Kent State

University conducted a survey of all students attending the junior high and the high school. Interviews and focus groups were also conducted with students — identified as victims or offenders— teachers and guidance counselors. Finally, the South Euclid Police Department purchased a Geographic Information System to complete crime and incident mapping of hotspots within the schools. The main findings pointed to four primary areas of concern: the environmental design of school areas, teachers knowledge and response to the problem, parents' attitudes and responses, and students perspectives and behaviors.

**Response:** The School Resource Officer worked in close collaboration with a social worker and university researcher throughout the project. They coordinated a Response Planning Team with membership from many stakeholders to respond to each of the areas identified in the analysis. Environmental changes included modifying the school bell times and increasing teacher supervision of hotspot areas. Counselors and social workers conducted teacher training courses in conflict resolution and bullying prevention. Parent education included mailings with information about bullying, an explanation of the new school policy, and discussion about what they could do at home to address the problems. Finally, student education focused on classroom discussions with homeroom teachers and students, and assemblies conducted by the SRO. The Ohio Department of Education also contributed by opening a new training center for "at risk students" to provide a non-traditional setting for specialized help. The SRO responded by helping to develop the new school bullying policy, conducting assemblies for students, and opening up a new substation within the school next to a hotspot.

**Assessment:** The results from the various responses were dramatic. School suspensions decreased 40 percent. Bullying incidents dropped 60 percent in the hallways,

and 80 percent in the gym area. Follow-up surveys indicated there were positive attitudinal changes among students about bullying and more students felt confident teachers would take action. Teachers also indicated that training sessions were helpful and that they were more likely to talk about bullying as a serious issue. Parents responded positively to the mailings and wanted more information about the problem in future mailings. The overall results suggested that the school environments were not only safer, but that early intervention was helping "at risk" students succeed in school.

### **S c a n n i n g**

In the 1990's, interpersonal harassment among juveniles at school (bullying, threatening and intimidation, hereafter referred to as "bullying") led to problems in both the junior and senior high schools in the community of South Euclid. Incidents that occurred in the community occasionally resulted in altercations in the schools and vice versa. To make matters worse, parents were often unsure whom to contact when their child had been the victim of bullying. They often turned to the police for resolution. It was clear that a better response was needed.

The 39 officers of the police department, along with the staff in the South Euclid/Lyndhurst School District, are responsible for the safety of 4425 students in six elementary schools, one upper-elementary school, one junior high school, and one high school in the region. In August 1997, a new school resource officer (SRO) began duties with the South Euclid/Lyndhurst School District in all of its schools. He was stunned by the students' disorderly behavior and how much of it appeared to go unchecked.

He began to talk with students about why they were sent to the principal's office and found that the majority was there for bullying. Through informal polling, the

SRO also discovered bullying to be the major concern of administrators in the schools.

The SRO reviewed school data regarding referrals to the principal's office and found that the high school reported thousands of referrals a year for bullying and the junior high school had recently experienced a 30 percent increase in referrals for bullying. Police data showed that juvenile complaints about disturbances, bullying, and assaults after school hours had increased 90 percent over the last 10 years.

In 1997, the school board and the police department sought a new, long-term solution to juvenile altercations in the school. Together, they applied for a grant from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) for developing innovative ways to respond to bullying in local schools.

## **Analysis**

The police department and the school district recognized that data needed to be collected to understand the prevalence of bullying. It was also necessary to have a clear definition of both the problem and the strategies currently employed to address bullying (as well as their effectiveness) before any intervention could be created.

This project focused on students in 7th through 12th grades. School, juvenile court, and police records all indicated that students in this age range were more likely to physically hurt each other. Often these events would escalate into a criminal matter with juvenile court involvement, so the criminal justice system was a vested interest in stopping the behavior before it went too far.

Additional data were collected in three ways:

### **Student survey**

A researcher from the school district devel-

oped a survey instrument in conjunction with consultants from Kent State University's Justice Studies program. A team comprised of school administrators, staff and university faculty reviewed it. Kent State researchers administered the survey to all students attending the junior high school and high school in the spring of 1999. The survey assessed a variety of behaviors, including physical violence, verbal threats, verbal put downs, thoughts of bringing a weapon to school and actually bringing a weapon to school. Students were asked how many times they had been victims; perpetrators or witnesses of bullying; whether or not people deserve to be bullied; who gets picked on; and their perceptions of school safety, fear and the likely causes of bullying. Inquiries were made about students' reactions to bullying, the reactions of their parents and teachers, and the locations and times in which they thought bullying was most likely to occur.

### **Interviews and Focus Groups**

Kent State researchers conducted one-on-one interviews with students identified as bullying victims or offenders. The researchers also held focus groups with school administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, security and custodial personnel to understand their perspectives on bullying. The focus groups were also conducted with several different peer groups (groups identified by school guidance counselors as bullies, victims, popular kids, etc.) who were neither victims nor offenders. To determine what students were likely to report, students participating in focus groups were asked what they considered to be a "weapon." Many categorized only guns and large knives as weapons. They did not include pocket knives, box cutters and other potential implements.

### **Mapping Program**

The South Euclid Police Department purchased Geographic Information System (GIS) software that allowed them to create a

computerized map of the junior high and high schools and surrounding areas. All reported incidents of bullying (along with other violations of school policy) were entered into the program and analyzed. Combining student responses with the mapping data revealed three "hotspot" locations of a high number of bullying incidents: hallways, the cafeteria and the gymnasium. This mapping program was both a tool used to analyze and assess data and a response tool that helped to enhance communication between the schools and police.

### **Summary of Main Findings**

Kent State researchers divided the findings from the various data that were collected into four areas: environmental design, teacher, parent, and student responses.

#### *Environmental Design Findings*

- Locations in the school with less supervision or denser population (primarily the hallways, cafeteria and gymnasium) were more likely to have higher rates of bullying.
- Students avoid certain places at school because fear of being bullied (for example, students avoid hallways near lockers of students who are not their friends or who are not in their classes).
- Race and ethnicity was not a primary factor in bullying.
- A vast majority of students reported witnessing bullying or being bullied in the classrooms during class.

#### *Teacher Issues*

- Although bullying occurs frequently, teachers and students infrequently intervene.
- When students were asked what would happen if they told a teacher about an incident of bullying, more than 30 percent said "nothing."
- In interviews, students said they wouldn't tell teachers about bullying incidents because they were afraid of

further retaliation, they expected the teacher to "do nothing" or were afraid the teacher wouldn't believe or support them, especially if the bully was popular or well liked by the teacher.

- Teachers agreed that students who bully are often considered "popular" or leaders by their peers.

#### *Parent Issues*

- Students who reported being physically disciplined at home were more likely to report that they had been bullied.
- More than one third of parents who had talked to their kids about bullying had instructed them to fight back. Students said they would not tell a parent if they are bullied because they believed their parents would "overreact."

#### *Student Issues*

- Kids who reported that they engaged in bullying typically perceive their own behavior as "playful" or "a normal part of growing up." They say that everyone gets picked on but some "don't know how to take it," "take things too seriously," or "just don't know how to fight back."
- Victims of bullying did not perceive this behavior as "fun" or "normal."
- Victims viewed bullies as "popular."
- Only 23 percent of students were likely to tell their parents they were a victim of bullying.
- Students were more likely to seek adult help for someone else who is bullied than for themselves.
- Students with lower grade point averages were significantly more likely to physically hurt someone else.
- Students who were secure in a peer group were more likely to intervene in bullying and less fearful of retaliation.
- Students suggested that involvement

in school activities helped them to form a niche where they felt safe, supported, and free from victimization.

As a result of these findings, a Response Planning Team was developed to create responses to bullying.

## Response

### **Response Planning Team**

The SRO partnered with a social worker and researcher to help develop and implement the response. They believed that teachers, administrators and police officers would be more likely to participate in responses if they were personally committed to them. Therefore, the first response strategy was to ensure the participation and commitment of many different stakeholders.

In particular, they formed a team of Kent State researchers, police officers, school administrators, teachers, students, and parents to interpret the analysis data and develop and implement responses. The team convened twice. In the first session, the team formed small groups to discuss the findings of the survey, interviews, focus groups and literature and then consider the implications of those findings. During the second session, the team again worked in their small groups and brainstormed realistic responses. These interventions were related to the specific goal of reducing the incidence of bullying and increasing the likelihood that students would report bullying at school. The team sessions allowed those who work daily with the school, community and students to share their expertise with the researchers. It also greatly contributed to the analysis and response, helping to reduce implementation obstacles.

The response planning team developed five main responses for implementation during the fall of 2000. The team realized that bullying was a complex problem and interventions aimed at reducing it should reflect that complexity. The planning

team agreed that interventions should be built on a partnership between the police and the schools to be successful.

### **Environmental Adaptation**

Mapping data analysis and information from student surveys had revealed three high-activity locations of bullying in the school: hallways, the cafeteria, and the gymnasium.

The team's first intervention strategy was aimed at changing the school environment to reduce bullying in particular locations. Prior to this project, all of the middle school students changed classes simultaneously throughout the day. Between classes, approximately 725 7th and 8th grade students would fill the hallways. During these times, teachers primarily remained in their classrooms. The school administration changed the class schedule to a staggered bell system so that only half the students would be changing classes at the same time. Further, the bell system was staggered by grade level so that older 8th grade students would not change classes at the same time as those students in the 7th grade. The administration also required teachers to work in teams to monitor the hallways.

The administration also increased the number of staff members present in the cafeteria during lunch. Increased lunch supervision was implemented to both deter students from bullying in the cafeteria and ensure discovery of bullying incidents that did occur. Supervision was also increased in the gymnasium.

Focus group participants and interviewees revealed that high school students were either unaware of the contracted private security staff or unclear of their role. Teachers and administrators were generally dissatisfied with the management of contracted security and with the lack of enthusiasm and caring they demonstrated. Teachers likened them to study hall monitors, which

was not their intended role in the school. In response, the school district approved the hiring of a new security staff. The new staff was hired as school district employees and was more focused on security-specific tasks at school. They were highly trained and very professional.

### **Teacher Training**

The alarming findings that students were reluctant to tell teachers about incidents of bullying were made worse by the fact that 34 percent of students said that they were unlikely to tell a teacher if they knew someone had brought a weapon to school. Further, only 13 percent of students thought things would get better if a teacher were told about incidents of bullying.

In response to these concerns, interviews with teachers revealed a variety of attitudes about the severity of the problem as well as their likely reaction to it. Many teachers felt that "bullying was just something kids do." Others wanted to address issues of bullying but were either constrained by time and class size or were not sure what the best response should be.

Although students tended to feel safe in the classroom, 60 percent of students reported bullying in classrooms during classes. Consequently, the team addressed three specific areas of concern:

- Teacher tolerance of bullying
- Teachers' inability to effectively address the bullying due to other priorities
- Need for increased training.

The response dealt with each of these issues. First, school psychologists and social workers conducted teacher training to bring to light the seriousness of bullying. Next, counselors and social workers conducted training with teachers at both the junior high and high school. Training included information on what bullying is, general characteristics of victims and offenders and strategies

for addressing and preventing bullying. In addition, teachers practiced techniques for addressing bullying through role-playing activities. Finally, teachers were instructed to discuss bullying with their students and to encourage them to report incidents as well as weapons at school.

### **Parent Education**

Kent State social workers prepared and sent three mailings of educational material on bullying to parents. All of the mailings required parents to read over the material with their kids and acknowledge they read it. The first mailing informed parents about the school district's new revised policy on bullying. The second mailing provided information on anger management and how to deescalate situations when their teen is angry. The final mailing, in addition to information about bullying, included a parent questionnaire asking about the material received through the year, the degree to which it was helpful and whether or not they had discussed the material and the issue of bullying with their child.

### **Student Education**

Students were educated on the effects and consequences of bullying both in the academic setting and in the juvenile justice system. This information was reinforced in three ways:

- The school district mailed information to the home, to be discussed with the child by a parent;
- Classroom discussions between home room teachers and students; and
- Student assemblies with the SRO community.

In response to the correlation to grade point average and problems with bullying, funding was secured through the Ohio Department of Education to open a technical training center. Academically "at risk students" were enrolled in this non-traditional setting. As they became successful in school their involvement in bullying decreased.

Suspensions for assault decreased by 40 percent.

### School Resource Officer

The SRO targeted his activities specifically toward the goal of dealing with the bullying problem in school. First, he helped the school district revise its student handbook to include bullying as a specific offense and created a statement on the seriousness of this violation in the South Euclid/ Lyndhurst schools. The statement clarified that police and juvenile court actions were distinct possibilities and that bullying would be taken seriously.

Next, the SRO presented this new policy to the students through a series of assemblies. The assemblies focused on the definition of bullying, the seriousness of bullying behavior among youth, and the role that law enforcement would play in the incidents that occurred in school and community. Students were also encouraged to report incidents to the two SRO's, teachers or administrators.

Finally, the junior high school administration made an office available for use as a police substation, allowing students and staff access to the SRO. The office is located in the cafeteria, one of the bullying hotspots. This allows for additional supervision of the cafeteria and an area of the gymnasium.

### Assessment

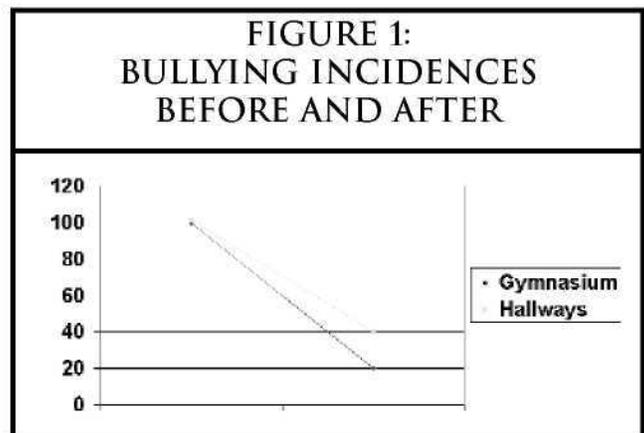
In the assessment phase of this project, Kent State researchers conducted:

- A follow-up survey with students; Focus groups with parents, teachers, administrators and students;
- One-on-one interviews with bullies and victims;
- A brief survey of parents;
- Incident analysis at school using the GIS software; and
- Training evaluation surveys for teachers.

Findings from the assessment phase of the project are discussed below.

### Environmental Adaptation

The most dramatic results of this project derived from the interventions targeting the school environment. The junior high school, experienced a 60 percent drop in incidents in the hallways and an 80 percent drop in the gym area. This decrease may be attributed to the increased presence of teachers in the hallway, the staggering of the bell schedule to reduce the number and mix of students in the hallways, or the increased monitoring of the gymnasium. Most of the bullying literature examined in research for the project did not describe responses regarding the physical environment of the school or the structure of the school day. However, in this project, these proved to be very effective strategies.



Education about reporting bullying and changes in teacher/staff responses initially led to an increase of reported incidents in these locations in the first quarter of the 2000-2001 school year. However, over the course of the school year, reported incidents of bullying were reduced by 40 percent. This is potentially due to the fact that there were fewer incidents of bullying to report.

The use of the mapping system in the schools continues. This year, for example, one hallway in the junior high school had a higher number of incidents than any other location in the school. The SRO took this information to the school principal. The

principal described that first year students — who are primarily separated from the rest of the school—must pass through a row of lockers of upperclassmen.

In focus groups, first year high school students reported a fear of being hassled by upperclassmen. Eighth graders also discussed the fear of being at the high school with older kids. This suggests that students in their first year of junior high school and high school may be justified in their fears of bullying by upperclassmen.

As a result of these findings, the principal made staff assigned to that area of the building aware of this problem. After supervision of these areas was increased, there were only two incidents of bullying reported during the remainder of the school year. This wing had experienced eight incidents in the first quarter of the school year.

### **Teacher Training and SRO Assemblies**

Findings from the follow-up student and teacher surveys reveal attitudinal changes among students with regard to bullying that may be related to the teacher training. In the follow-up survey, students reported an increased likelihood they would tell a teacher if they saw someone else bullied. However, they are still reluctant to tell teachers if they themselves are the victims. The follow-up survey also reveals that fewer students perceive that teachers would "do nothing." More students agreed the school district is taking bullying more seriously.

The teacher survey revealed that they were satisfied with and benefited from the training sessions. Teachers' and administrators' attitudes about bullying were vastly different from the previous year. The survey respondents were more likely to talk about bullying as a serious issue and see themselves as potential conduits for intervention.

**Parent Education** yet made the district a safer place for Focus groups with parents revealed that

they responded positively to the mailings. Parents also requested that more mailings be sent to them in the future relating to social concerns involving their children. More students this year, nearly 1 in 3, were instructed by their parents to "tell a teacher" in order to deal with bullies compared to 1 in 5 the previous year. Eighty-four percent of students stated they would likely resolve an incident of bullying using nonviolent means.

The administration hoped that the materials sent home to parents would reduce the number of parents that would instruct their children to fight back. In the initial phase of the project, students who indicated that their parents told them to "fight back" were found to be more likely to victimize others. The assessment showed no change. At the time this submission was written, it still appears that more work is needed to educate parents on bullying and find ways to help their kids resolve problems through non-violent or non-bullying means.

The partnership between the South Euclid Police Department and the South Euclid/Lyndhurst City Schools can be modeled by other agencies and school districts. The partnership approach helped both the school community and the community at large combat bullying.

When this submission was written, bullying and suspensions for fighting by junior high school students had been significantly reduced simply because of early intervention. More students who were academically "at risk" are succeeding and graduating.

In this case, a police officer thinking "outside the box" teamed with a social worker and researcher with the same vision and helped lead a school district to change. The changes were painless and inexpensive, yet made the district a safer place for students.