

VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

SUMMARY

Recent violence in San Diego County Schools has created an immediate need for an investigation into what is being done to curtail violence and examine important programs that have been discontinued due to funding cutbacks. The 2006-2007 San Diego County Grand Jury approved a study to examine the issue in County schools and investigate various programs and resources that are available to address the problem.

There have been many national incidents of school violence since the 1999 Columbine shootings in Colorado. Since September of last year (2006), there have been nine major incidents of violence in Wisconsin, Colorado and Pennsylvania; some including deaths of students and faculty.

A conference on School Safety, convened on October 10, 2006, in Maryland, attended by President and Mrs. Bush, and moderated by Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, brought together experts, law enforcement officials, schools and communities to provide guidance on how to prevent and recover from these tragedies. The President challenged the nation to turn its remorse into aggressive action to keep kids safe.

Discussion at the White House conference included education issues, school spending, teacher quality, parental involvement and the curriculum. However, when the experts focused on the issue of violence in our schools and keeping kids safe, it became apparent that the lack of new solutions was not surprising. School safety experts have said for years that changing school culture is the best way to halt violence, although it's hard to do. The administration, compelled to respond to the violence of the September tragedies, said a public sharing of ideas would help because the nation is suddenly focused on school safety. First Lady Laura Bush said school children need to know that grown-ups are protecting them.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Violence in schools is increasing. Discipline is less predictable and not uniformly enforced. The Grand Jury felt motivated to become thoroughly familiar with the various aspects of school violence and to examine the programs available to the various school districts served by the San Diego County Office of Education and the National Safe Schools Institute. The goal and objective of this Grand Jury is to ensure that all schools in the County of San Diego are well informed and given adequate support to prevent violence in schools and to provide training for counseling and social work in the aftermath of violence that has occurred.

PROCEDURE

- October 12, 2006: On-site visit to the San Diego County Office of Education to discuss the Safe School Program
- Interviews:
 - November 13, 2006: Representative for the National School District to discuss its Safe School Program
 - November 14, 2006: San Diego Unified School District Representative to discuss its Safe School Program
 - January 9, 2007: Grossmont Union High School District (GUHSD) representative to examine its Safe School Program
 - January 23, 2007: Security Officer for San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) to examine procedures and interaction between San Diego Police Department and SDUSD security.

DISCUSSION

The first action of the Grand Jury was to identify and become familiar with the various facets of school violence. The next step was to review the San Diego County Office of Education Safe School program and determine what programs are available to the various school districts to educate students, faculty and staff of the potential for school violence. Additionally, the Jury felt it was important to investigate what national programs are available to assist in addressing school violence.

San Diego County Office of Education

- Sponsors a safe schools unit
- Provides security training and technical assistance to districts
- Promotes positive and personal-best behavior for students
- Fosters partnerships for school and community safety
- Develops crisis response plans
- Instructs classroom teachers of emergency first aid procedures

National Safe Schools Unit

- Is a national conference of community leaders
- Focuses on children, youth, families and health/human services
- Offers after school education and safety

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

- Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum
 - For preschool/kindergarten through grade nine
 - Classroom-based social skills program
 - Impulse control and problem solving

The U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005 Indicator of School Crime and Safety, provides data on crime and safety at schools from the perspectives of students, teachers, principals, and the general population. A joint effort by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics provides the most current detailed statistical information on the nature of crime in schools, school environments and responses to violence and crime at school. Highlights include the following:

- From July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2005, there were 21 homicides of students (ages 5 to 18) at school.
- In 2003-2004 teachers' reports of being threatened or attacked by students varied according to their school level.
- The percentage of public schools experiencing one or more violent incidents increased between the 1999-2000 and 2003-2004 school years from 71 to 81 percent.

Types of School Offenses

- Bullying
- Property crimes
- Crimes against persons
- Drug and alcohol offenses
- Possession of weapons
- Gang activity

The investigation began with a visit to the San Diego County Office of Education by the Jury. The intent was to become familiar with the Safe Schools Home Program sponsored by the San Diego County Office of Education. Additionally, the Jury requested

information on the effectiveness of the services provided and a list of contacts from outlying school districts supported by the San Diego County Office of Education.

The “Safe School Program” is assisted by guidance from the National Safe Schools Institute. The Institute provided an annual review of the Safe School program in October/November, 2003. There has been no review of the program since then.

The goal and objective of the Jury was to gather information about the “Safe School Program” as mandated by the California Constitution, Article 1, Declaration of Rights, Section 7(a) which gives every public school student an inalienable right to a safe and secure campus. The Jury was provided the Mission Statement of the Safe Schools Unit “which is to provide comprehensive services and assistance to school communities in developing approaches by which all students feel safe and empowered to achieve academic and personal objectives.” The Jury was provided with the Office of Education’s evaluation of various forms of school offenses which included:

- **Property Crimes:** Toxic spills, vandalism, theft, burglary, arson and graffiti
- **Crimes Against Persons:** Bullying, battery, assault, robbery, extortion, sex offenses and homicides
- **Drug and Alcohol Offenses:** Possession, sales, use and paraphernalia
- **Possession of Weapons:** Guns, improvised guns, knives and homemade bombs
- **Gang Activity:** Terrorism, gang fights and severe intimidation

Bullying is a form of violence that has increased in recent years. Bullying among students of primary school age has become recognized as an antecedent to more violent behavior in later grades.

An important explanation of the rise in school violence can be found in changes in the American family. The traditional two-parent family has been increasingly replaced by single-parent families. Children have often been put at risk, neglected and abused resulting in discipline problems at school.

The Jury was advised that the San Diego County Office of Education administered a program labeled GRIP (Gang Risk Intervention Program) which dealt with gang problems. GRIP was a promising program for its effectiveness. During the 2004-2005 school year, all GRIP school administrators reported a 70% decrease in the incidence of students being admonished for disciplinary action. However, lack of funding in 2006, caused that unit to disband. The Office of Education staff still attempts to deal with gang

problems and enlists the help of college mentors to provide assistance to gang “wannabes.”

The Jury was made aware of circumstances that can lead to school violence. These include:

- Changes in the American family
 - Single-parent families put children at risk of neglect and abuse
 - Behavior problems such as running away, fighting, stealing
 - Welfare system and punitive taxation of families
- Enforcement of discipline in schools
- Gang influence
- Racial and cultural inequities

The representative advised the Grand Jury of student civil rights issues, which dilute staff efforts to confront and discipline students. For example, discipline by school staff cannot be administered unless a student is given a copy of the complaint against him/her, the parents are notified and the student and parents are interviewed.

Further research by the Jury revealed legal restrictions on some forms of discipline have added an administrative burden on school administrators and faculty which sometimes discourages them from taking action even when it is warranted.

San Diego Unified School District:

An interview with a representative of the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) re-affirmed the concerns regarding violence in schools. Bullying, gang activity, racial issues and drugs all seemed to be catalysts for the problem of school violence. SDUSD has several programs within the district which deal with these issues as well as life skills concerning tobacco, alcohol and drugs. The SDUSD has its own Safe School Program based on the principles of the San Diego County Office of Education. The program (for all grade levels) includes:

- Classes on alcohol, tobacco and life skills
- Methods to resolve disputes non-violently
- Classes on race and human relationships
- An elementary program “Don’t Laugh at Me,” for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades

The district keeps records on violent incidents, does assessments and determines accountability. If it is determined that the student is competent, there could be a suspension or an expulsion. If there is an expulsion, the district recommends a “day”

school for the student. The County Board of Education operates Summit Schools for students removed from the school they usually attend for a serious offense. Reports are made available to the parent/guardian, school and police department, when warranted. If there is a serious incident, for example, involving a knife, a determination is made to see if the student involved is in a special education class, is able to understand right from wrong, or if the student is lacking in judgment. A specific course of action will be determined, on an individual basis, by the needs of the special education student

The general consensus is that boys are more physically violent than girls. Girls seem to be more verbally abusive but there have been reports of increased physical violence among them. Appendix (A) is a seven year compilation of crime statistics furnished by SDSUD.

A concern of the district, as reported to the Grand Jury during an interview by an official of SDUSD, is the ratio of counselors to the student population; currently one counselor for two thousand students (1/2000) in high school, one counselor for 360 students (1/360) in middle school and one counselor for 500 students (1/500) in elementary school. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 1-to-250 counselors to students.

The SDUSD maintains its own security department, as authorized by state law. The department is vested with full peace officer powers and governed by the State of California, Peace Officers Standard and Training. The SDUSD Security Department has 38 sworn security officers, 22 community service officers, eight patrol officers and 15 support staff distributed among 180 schools. An interview with a senior staff member for SDUSD Security provided a comprehensive review of programs undertaken by that department.

The school district security department is supplementary to the city police. Recent reductions within SDPD, specifically within juvenile services, have impacted service level to schools. Programs such as Drug Awareness Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) and School Safety Patrol (SSP) have been either significantly reduced or eliminated in schools.

The school district police department maintains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (see Appendix (B) with the SDPD).

Annually, officers and supervisors from both agencies train together. Training includes legal updates, procedure for dealing with an active shooter, defensive driving, teen court and campus crime stoppers.

School police officers receive training from various departments such as Race and Human Relations, Guidance and Counseling and Facilities Management. Additionally,

the school police officers receive training related only to school policing and student interaction.

National School District (National City, California)

An interview with the National School District (NSD) representative provided information about “Second Step,” A program designed to reduce impulsive, high risk and aggressive behaviors and increase children’s social-emotional competence and other protective factors. This program teaches social and emotional skills for violence prevention. It includes teacher-friendly curricula, training for educators and parent-education components. It also deals with bullying, substance abuse, conflict resolution, gangs and race relations. The entire staff and faculty in the district receive video training. Bus drivers, gardeners and maintenance personnel also receive “Second Step” training. The “Before and After School” program incorporates training and recommendations for parents and guardians. There are three counselors for up to 900 (3/900) students in this program.

Three National City Schools are targeted for a proposed School Community Violence Prevention Program (SCVP):

1. **Central Elementary School (762 students in Grades K-6)**
2. **El Toyon Elementary School (461 students in Grades K-6)**
3. **Lincoln Acres Elementary School (758 students in Grades K-6)**

The proposed SCVP program would directly serve all 1,981 students at these three schools, which have the highest suspension and expulsion rates in the National School District. The following statistics were provided by the 2004-2005 School Reporting Form for the Uniform Management Information Reporting System (UMIRS) for the three schools:

- Twenty-three incidents of caused, attempted or threatened to cause physical injury
- Twenty-five incidents of disruption or defiance
- Twelve incidents of willful use of force or violence, except in self-defense
- Eleven incidents of obscenity, profanity or vulgarity
- Six incidents involving use of a dangerous object
- Two incidents using drugs or alcohol
- Two incidents of damage or attempted damage to school property or private property
- One incident of possession of an imitation firearm

A focus group process is used to identify concerns about school safety at each of the three target schools. Students meet for approximately 45 minutes with the Safe Schools District Coordinator and the site counselor. Discussions take place and the students share their safety concerns. At the end of the discussion, students voice what they consider the

greatest safety issues on their school campus. Student groups and community groups meet separately. The community liaisons at each of the target schools meet with parents and community members to discuss their school safety concerns.

The ten schools in the National School District have police protection by the National City Police Department.

Grossmont Union High School District

An Interview with the Grossmont Union High School District (GUHSD) representative provided a comprehensive review of the procedures utilized for the schools within the district. The 11 high schools in this district provide education for 24,000 students. The GUHSD uses the San Diego County Office of Education Safe School Program for annual training; however as a result of two major violent school crimes, the Santana High School shootings on March 5, 2001 and the Granite Hills High School shooting on March 22, 2001, the GUHSD incorporated a “Lessons Commission Recommendations” program.

In 2006 the following physical altercations resulted in seventy-five student expulsions:

- Threats attempting or causing injury to students or staff
- Ten students expelled for assaulting a staff member

For the purpose of this study the only documentation extracted from the program matrix is identified by Sections, District Status, Safe Facilities, Crisis Response, Adult Participation and Assessment & Evaluation.

A. Section I. Safety Measures: Established School Resource Officers (SRO), Safe School Coordinators and Campus Safety Teams for each campus. Their duties involve coordinating with local law enforcement to establish recommended safety measures.

District Status: Safe school plans are reviewed on an annual basis. All law enforcement recommendations have been implemented. Safe school coordinators have been eliminated due to lack of funding.

B. Section II. Safe Facilities: Identified the need for repairs of a public address system, a classroom communication system and a recommendation for video cameras to be installed at each high school campus.

District Status: A bond was passed in 2004 which provided funding for the installation of the recommended safe school equipment.

C. Section III. Crisis Response: Conduct annual crisis response training (provided by local law enforcement) and annual emergency response drills.

District Status: On-going.

D. Section IV. Adult Participation: Engaged the community to increase the number of adults on all campuses and utilize parent, community and program volunteers.

District Status: There is currently a wide array of volunteers. The district has implemented Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and uses volunteers to assist an electronic fingerprinting facility connected to Sacramento for conducting criminal background checks **on parent, community and program volunteers.**

E. Section V. Assessment & Evaluation: Continue annual safety surveys of students, staff and parents.

District Status: On-going. The surveys allow faculty, staff and parents to view student grades, attendance and units earned. This is an on-line system supported by the Information and Technology Department.

F. Monte Vista High School Emergency Box: Emergency boxes are located at two strategic sites on campus. The contents include a pictorial student directory, emergency contact lists, and locations of fire extinguishers, fire alarm pull stations and emergency shut-off valves, etc. There are a total of fifteen items in the emergency box to assist staff to handle any emergency.

G. Granite Hills High School: A comprehensive site emergency and crisis plan for staff has been compiled which includes:

- Emergency drills and disaster preparedness
- Emergency evacuation
- Earthquake and fire drills
- Lockdown procedures
- Bioterrorism preparation
- Central point command post
- Medical/first aid
- Crisis response for active shooter, kidnapping or other major crisis.
- Identified Crisis Teams in the event of:
 - Death
 - Gang Actions
 - Molestation
 - Suicide
 - Rape

FACTS/FINDINGS

Safe School Program Review

Fact: There has been no review of the program by the National Safe School **Institute** since November 2003.

Finding: The San Diego County Office of Education was provided information which was relevant to violence in schools based on history prior to 2003. Violence in schools continues and may be influenced by current trends with gangs, copycat crimes and changes to the mores of our society.

Gang Risk Intervention Program

Fact: The Jury was advised that the San Diego County Office of Education administered a program labeled GRIP (Gang Risk Intervention Program) which dealt with gang problems; however lack of funding caused that unit to disband.

Finding: The Office of Education staff still attempts to deal with gang problems and enlists the help of college mentors to deal with gang “wannabes.” Current statistics indicate that gang related problems have escalated in recent years, especially in drive by shootings.

Student to Counselor Ratio Deficiency

Fact: California long has had one of the worst student-to-counselor ratios in the nation. A concern of the SDUSD district is the ratio of counselors to the student population: currently one counselor for two thousand students (1/2000) in high school; one counselor for 360 students (1/360) in middle school; and one counselor for 500 students (1/500) in elementary school.

Finding: According to the American School Counselor Association, the state’s average student-to-counselor ratio in elementary school through high school was 966-to-1 in 2004. The national average was 488-to-1. However, help has arrived. Public middle and high schools throughout California are getting \$200 million this year from the state of California to hire an additional 3,000 counselors – boosting by more than 40% the number of guidance professionals assisting students social, emotional and academic needs.

Drug Awareness Resistance Education

Fact: Recent reductions within SDPD, specifically within juvenile services, have impacted service level to schools. Programs such as Drug Awareness Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) and School Safety Patrol (SSP) have been either significantly reduced or eliminated.

Finding: Drug Abuse Resistance Education, D.A.R.E., is a publicly funded program that uses law enforcement resources to help children resist drugs and gangs and to target at-risk groups and solicit information for police consideration.

Preventing adolescent drug abuse is a national concern. A number of programs have been developed to tackle the problem; yet teen drug use has gone up.

Safe School Coordinators

Fact: Safe School Coordinators have been eliminated at Grossmont Union High School District due to lack of funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2006-2007 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the San Diego County Office of Education:

- 07-01:** Petition the National Safe School Institute for a review and critique of current requirements mandated by the National Safe School Institute.
- 07-02:** Request funding to reinstitute the GRIP program.
- 07-03:** Solicit the state funds and recruit additional counselors to meet the American School Counselor recommended ratios of 1-to-250 counselors to students.
- 07-04:** Become pro-active by soliciting funds for reinstatement of the D.A.R.E. and SSP programs.

The 2006-2007 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the Grossmont Union High School District:

- 07-05:** Consider the need for reinstating the position of Safe School Coordinator and seek all possible funding from the State and Local governments to support this program.

REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

The California Penal Code §933(c) requires any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the agency. Such comment shall be made *no later than 90 days* after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court); except that in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g. District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such comment shall be made *within 60 days* to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, California Penal Code §933.05(a), (b), (c), details, as follows, the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made:

- (a) As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
 - (1) The respondent agrees with the finding
 - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.
- (b) As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
 - (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
 - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
 - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
 - (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.
- (c) If a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with the Penal Code §933.05 are required from the:

<u>Responding Agency</u>	<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Date</u>
San Diego County Office of Education	07-1 through 07-04	07/24/07
Grossmont Union High School District	07-05	07/24/07

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Committee for Children: www.cfchildren.org

Peacebuilders: www.peacebuilders.com

Bullying Prevention: www.channing-bete.com

Character Counts: www.charactercounts.org

Operation Respect: www.operationrespect.org

Stop Kids from Killing Kids: www.tfk.org

Life Skills: www.lifeskillstraining.com