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A Comprehensive Analysis of Police Presence in
Independent School Districts and of Future
Challenges Facing Educational Law Enforcement

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Abstract

Since the 1950's crime has been on the rise and becoming increasingly violent in America's public schools. With the constant growth of schools nationwide, a fear of the lack of safety has swept the communities, school administrators, parents and especially students. Schools have had to develop safe school measures not only to fight crime but also to intervene and prevent future violence. Every person has a right to an education, and communities are charged with providing a safe environment for this to take place.

The following information is a result of statistical research and surveys, an effort to determine how school policing has evolved and why, to determine the most effective and applicable solutions to accomplishing the goal of keeping public schools safe. This includes preventing future violence through proactive police presence in schools and implementation of programs for students by the officers on campuses. Many schools have hired security personnel for visibility and deterrence. A more recent and popular method employed by schools is the hiring of law enforcement officers contracted through municipal and local county agencies to provide police services and teach safe school related programs. This has proven to be effective, but has raised questions on who controls the actions that officers take when handling student incidents.

The boldest initiative was born in the recent past which is the development of school district police agencies that are governed by the school systems and provide law enforcement services as well as provide a wealth of other services to the nation's communities and schools. This could prove to be the wave of the future in school safety initiatives.

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INTRODUCTION

A survey was conducted in recent years that addressed the issue of school safety. This national survey was based on interviews of one-thousand teachers from grades three through twelve, and including one-thousand one-hundred eighty-three students from the same grades. That survey concluded that, in general, teachers felt fairly safe. However, fifty percent of interviewed students felt as though they were not safe at school, and twenty-two percent felt they were from somewhat, to very worried about being hurt in school (Harris Louis & Associates, Inc., 1993)

Over the years, school districts nationwide have seen the need for increased security measures, and have responded by taking steps to ensure a safe learning environment. Many believe that safety, not a tangible item, but rather a feeling is of the utmost importance in creating a stable learning environment. Safety measures stemming from the 1950's to present

have included hiring of security guards to monitor student behavior. In more recent years, many school districts have contracted with local law enforcement agencies, via inter-local government agreements, to provide extra police protection during school days and school hours. These officers are commonly titled School Resource Officers. In the 1980's, school districts began taking a bold initiative to school safety measures as crime and violence was on the rise inside our nation's schools. School district police departments, complete with fully certified peace officers, began integrating into America's school systems. This would forever change the educational environment and how the issue of safety is approached. This paper is a comprehensive analysis of police presence within school districts in the past and present to determine and prepare for future challenges faced by educational law enforcement.

This project will address the problem of the need for increasing school safety. This will be accomplished by first analyzing the evolution of police presence in schools. What was the original purpose and how has that expanded into the present. The answer to these questions, along with perceptions of school administrators and law enforcement officials as to the future challenges to be faced by school police will most certainly unmask many unforeseen challenges and lend to strategies to safeguard our country's students in the educational setting.

School policing is relatively new to the United States, and has limited historical background that can be researched. There are many styles of school policing that are widely utilized. The most common of these is the use of School Resource Officers and School District Police Departments. One method of inquiry will include results of research based on crime statistics. Statistics from Government agencies, schools and police departments will not only show trends that led to the envelopment of law enforcement into schools, but will also show effectiveness of certain practices and programs in reducing school crime. Another tool that will

be utilized is the process of surveying. What are the different practices employed and why? What have been and what are the major concerns of schools, the public, parents and pupils, and law enforcement officials charged with providing safety and security within the Nation's schools as we proceed into the 21st century.

The intended outcome of this research project is to show that clearly, school safety is a key concern to school administrators, students, parents, the general public and police officials. With a synopsis of where we have been and where we are now due to our efforts, we will certainly unearth many major concerns and develop goals in regard to the future safety of schools. We will also discover more ways to be proactive through prevention, intervention and education to develop an even safer school climate.

The results of this project will benefit school police department officials and will also peer into the future to know where to focus attention and prepare for the future. School districts will then be able to feel at ease in educating, and the community in general will see a reduction in school crime and violence. Finally students will be afforded a better education in a safer environment.

Review of Literature

There is a limited, but expanding amount of research available in the field of school policing. This practice is still only in its youth. This unique brand of law enforcement is accomplished and defined in various fashions. School policing, overall, is a response to years of national concern over school safety. For all intents and purposes the evolution of security/police in schools began in the 1950's (Burgan & Rubal,1980). It is during this decade that the necessity for a security presence came to light. Some school systems in the nation had security officers mainly as a deterrent for students against violating school rules (Burgan & Rubal,1980).

By the 1960's the world was drastically changing, if only in general perception. These changes can be attributed partially to the attitude *of* the era, and also to the media. It was during these times that young people witnessed effects *of* war, rioting and rebellion. Rebellion against all authority was becoming a more frequent problem for the police and for school administrators as well as many other authority figures. Use *of* drugs was on the rise and it was during this period that the public began separating school infractions from crime (Blauvelt,1984). Police and security became more common on school campuses in response to general crime problems.

A majority *of* school districts that served a student population *of* 100,000 or more maintained some type *of* security service *by* the early 1970's (Gaustad,J.,1990). Whether employed by the district, contracted by private security companies, or even off-duty police officers employed *by* the schools to be present on campuses. At this point, there was still no real established working relationship between schools and law enforcement. Crime problems in schools were mounting. A survey taken *by* the National Institute *of* Education in the 1976-1977 school year showed that in a typical month, about 282,000 students were attacked physically while at school with nearly half *of* those attacks resulting in injury. Somewhere near 112,000 students had something taken from them *by* someone using force, the threat *of* force or a weapon, and about 5,200 teachers were physically attacked.

The research also indicated that risk of violence to teenagers is greater in school than anywhere else - two-thirds of all assaults and one-half of all assaults committed against teenagers, age 12-15 , occur at school. The National Institute of Justice made the recommendation that a commitment must be made to emphasize increased communications between school officials and law enforcement.(Smith ,1984)

As time continued into the 80's, the mere presence of security guards who had little or no law enforcement powers, or off-duty police officers who might naturally feel liability constraints or did not have clear, established guidelines on how to handle juvenile crime in a school setting, had limited impact on crime in schools. The feeling in the Sixties and Seventies of the general national opinion was that school officials were soft on crime and that law enforcement personnel were "poorly trained sadists" who were only interested in busting heads. (Blauvelt, 1984). Crime continued to increase nationwide in school districts across America. It was during the 1980's that criminal street gangs, large contributors to violent and destructive crime, became sensationalized in the media and thus had a crippling effect on education efforts in schools across the United States. Another contributing factor to the rise in crime was the growth in student numbers. With growing numbers of security measures added for school safety, parents in general accepted the movement but students showed signs of resentment for being monitored by outside authority figures. (Burgen & Rubel, 1980)

From the 1980's moving into the 90's many school districts entered into inter-local governmental agreements set up through legislation to contract with municipal police agencies and through county law enforcement agencies to provide school resource officers, commonly referred to as SRO' s (Moriarty & Fitzgerald,1989). In some states, such as South Carolina, this is a statewide practice in high schools and junior high schools. These designated officers spent

the majority of their work time on the campuses, working with students and administrators and parents to ensure school safety (Holmes, 1995).

Also becoming more widely utilized by this point, and the main focus of this research is the school district police department. A bold initiative was set up again through legislation on the state level. This empowered the board of directors of school districts to employ a full time, fully certified police department based on the individual needs of the district, that was governed not only by that school district, but also by the state law enforcement regulation commission.

A phrase used previously in this report was school safety. There is more than one definition for school safety. School safety has been defined by crime statistics, by the appearance of a strong uniformed presence that enforces laws and rules and by the severity of the crimes that do or do not occur in certain areas. Many in the field of school policing more recently have submitted that school safety is truly measured by a perception, a feeling that students, teachers and visitors of school campuses have on America's school campuses. In an article titled Keeping the Peace author Kenneth S. Trump(1998) discusses what has begun to be popular opinion. This includes the sentiment of school safety plans and that schools nationwide are hiring more personnel that are dedicated exclusively to providing security in the educational setting. However, Trump states that it is very important that not only do the security forces enforce rules or law, but that they focus on balancing enforcement with prevention and intervention techniques. Trump outlines the evolution of law enforcement in school environments. Many schools could choose to employ security personnel that could enforce rules of the house and be under total control of the school administration. Another option is the school resource officer. These are simply city or county law enforcement officers assigned to work in the schools within their jurisdiction. The benefit of these programs, which are increasing nationwide, are that

schools have duly sworn law officers who can also teach awareness and prevention classes to double their effects. However, Trump advises that there are many administrative issues that must first be worked out, including guidelines for supervision of the officers. Some districts also employ off-duty part-time police officers but Trump warns that this could be inconsistent with the schools needs as the officers frequently tie their loyalty with their regular police duties and not to the school district. These officers also usually receive low pay and have a high turnover rate which also can lead to inconsistencies in enforcing security measures. Trump also outlines the relatively new use of school district police which are common in western and southern states of the country. These are regular law enforcement entities that are paid by the school. This means a full time policing program designed to meet the needs of the district. However, the training, authority and operational needs of these departments generally require much larger budgets to operate and many school districts believe the cost is too high. Trump outlines the current available resource programs and shows that they all have positive aspects and any district employing one of these methods should tailor it to meet their needs.

In 1993 the California Legislature held a Senate hearing on school violence in which they heard from witnesses ranging from students, victims of violence in schools, school administrators, law enforcers in school settings and even from students who committed crimes in schools. Summing up the general opinion for all involved, a district hearing officer advised that the common belief did not lie largely in school law enforcement, but that crime in schools is a product of to day's society and can only be decreased by large societal changes. Ronald Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Center, states what is a widespread national belief that one, if not the most critical issue facing the country today is creating a safe school climate. "Students, parents, law enforcement, mental health, business and community leaders,

and a wide array of youth-serving professionals should be involved in the process" (Stephens,R.) Stephens stresses that law enforcement agencies, school districts, parents and students must establish a working relationship to combat the problem.

Nearly three million index crimes occur on or around school campuses each year, according to the National Crime Survey. That is roughly 16,000 per school day. Index crimes are crimes that if an adult committed could result in incarceration. In Maine, the State Legislature studied the issue of crime involving children, teenagers and young adults and found that the four most common types of violent behavior reported were: verbal harassment, aggressive behavior, threatening physical harm and fist fights, hair pulling, etc. In the Aldine ISD in Harris County, Texas one unspecified month showed 256 criminal cases handled by the school district police. This included 34 juvenile and adult arrests, 47 alarm in schools responses, 56 disturbances, fights, assaults and threats, 27 instances of criminal mischief and 7 stolen/abandoned vehicles and several miscellaneous reports (McGee & Knowles,1994). These are only a few examples of crime statistics in different areas of the country. In almost every instance, the research of school safety includes findings that schools nationwide should track instances of crime in their jurisdiction, that they should devise a school safety plan based on their needs and that they should devise some working relationship with law enforcement and recommend some security or police presence and interaction with school staff, parents and students to provide a safer school environment.

METHODOLOGY

Few, if any, object with the belief that school safety is paramount in America's schools today. Different methods for addressing this topic have been employed by different states, school systems and communities with varying results. What can these results suggest to educators and

law enforcement nationwide to promote safer school atmospheres? What are the more widely used methods and why? Does one of these methods or combinations of methods provide better results that encompasses all concerns and that outweighs the side-effects or difficulties that are created such as cost analysis? One way to find answers to these questions is through the process of surveying. School administrators, teachers, students and law enforcement officials hold the key to providing a safer climate in the arena of education. When asked to respond to these issues and to express concerns, a general plan of attack should be more visible.

Another useful method for gathering information is through statistical research. As different methods and strategies are utilized and the results are tracked, surely there must be evident trends in what is acceptable and what is effective. The National Institute of Justice, the United States Department of Justice track crime statistics in various manners and for different reasons. They, and other institutions including the National Institute of Education and state legislatures, but in no way limited to these, also make reports accessible to the public for review in ways to make improvements and include or delete ineffective or negative aspects. By pooling this available research trends can be observed and positive actions can be taken by school administrators and law enforcement officials as well as policy made and accepted by communities and parents.

The result of survey and gathering of statistical data can sometimes be twisted or misinterpreted to meet the researcher's objectives or to answer the posed research question rather than contradict the intended outcome, which sometimes occurs. In this study, it is the goal of the student / researcher to objectively analyze the collected data and to openly report the survey's public opinions and perceptions. It is believed by the writer that while any measures to promote school safety are better than none, and some are more elaborate and proactive than others, a well

developed school district police agency funded in full by the district and created to be proactive, focusing on prevention and intervention through participation and interaction on the campus levels can far outweigh any negatives or cost factors and provide to be the most vital tool in creating a safe school environment.

FINDINGS

In 1994 the National School Boards Association conducted a survey in which 720 affiliate school districts responded. Eighty percent of schools reported increasing violence over the past five years. Sixty percent reported weapons incidents. And three-fourths reported that their school had dealt with violent student on student attacks in the past school(National School Boards Association, 1994).In the same year the FBI's uniform crime report advised that eight percent of students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon. Five percent of high school students advised that they had stayed home at least one day due to feeling unsafe at school. In 1996, the U.S. Department of Education conducted a survey where principals nationwide were asked to report incidents of certain types of crimes during that year. The results are as follows:

These figures clearly show a large number of violent crimes in the Nation's schools. This survey also listed other crimes such as murder and suicide but the figures were not large enough to include. In analyzing collected data it is found that schools in large part across the country have

taken some type of safe school measure in an effort to lower crime and to create a safer learning environment by preventing school violence. In 1992 the Bath School District in New York showed twice the number of offenses committed by juveniles that showed behavior indicating a need for supervision, than in 1991 (Trump,K., 1998) Their measures began with the hiring of a police officer by the City of Bath and the school district to handle juvenile crime on and off of school grounds. They reported that the officer had a dramatic effect on juvenile truancy and crime (Skelly,1997). In Rich East High School in Park Forest, Illinois a police liaison program has reportedly been very successful due to expertise lent to the schools administration and relationships built between students and officers. (Moriarty and Fitzgerald,1989) In the Wake County public school system, two local sheriff s deputies were placed into high schools with the main purpose of law enforcement but they also interacted with students by making classroom presentations, parent conferences and attended school events (Prohm,1995). Memphis, Tennessee and Providence, Rhode Island schools have placed school resource officers on campuses to fight crime and also to work with students on crime prevention programs and safety issues. Many other states and school resource police officers and will be detailed in survey results.

Buffalo Public Schools have increased security staff and enforcement measures to answer the call of securing school safety. This move was also found to be popular in Indianapolis, Newark, New Orleans and in Oklahoma City where security staff monitors parking lots. In Norfolk, Virginia officials have stumbled onto what many other school systems are learning, they have hired 39 more security officers and yet still require more assistance from local law enforcement.(Council of the Great City Schools,1993) Also it was found that all of these major school systems generally say something about the intervention and prevention

programs being implemented such as DARE, GREAT, Conflict Resolution, peer counseling and many others that law enforcement generally assist in teaching, but the security departments apparently do not participate in as part of their regular duties.

Other major school districts report that yes, they have begun safety programs and intervention programs, but no mention is made of any security or police presence to teach the programs or to be present in the daily school experience. Examples of some of these are Columbus, Ohio, Dade Co., Florida, El Paso, Texas and Minneapolis, Minnesota to name only a few. (Council of the Great City Schools, 1993) One other example found that utilizes one aspect of the different safety tools available was in Broward County, Florida. Schools were seeing that their campuses were easy targets for break-ins, theft, and vandalism at night. Their solution was to have patrol officers from the city police force, stop in to schools in their area during the night shift to do their written reports accumulated throughout the shift, rather than returning to the station and being taken off of the streets (National School Resource Network, 1979). Reportedly this has been successful in reducing nighttime incidents.

Throughout the nation, primarily in the Western and Southern states, a unique blend of similar safety measures has been employed by school districts everywhere. This is the beginning of school district police departments. School district police departments are fully certified, law enforcement agencies with regular and specialized training for officers working in the educational environment. Their jurisdictional area and special duties are set by the superintendent and school officials for the school district. Like SRO's and security staff, school district police officers are stationed on the campuses and interact with students, parents and faculty. There are over 100 school district police agencies in the State of Texas alone.

In February of 2001 representatives of 21 different Texas law enforcement agencies spread out geographically among many areas of the state, were asked to participate in a survey to determine what actions, if any, that their local school system utilized as far as placing security or police in schools and what impact that has had and a few other related issues. Over 90% of those polled responded to the survey. Roughly 28% of those replying advised that their area had a school district police agency. Approximately 65% advised that their school system used school resource officers for security measures. Finally approximately 7% reported that they had neither, and relied only upon 911 calls received in time of need from the schools.

Table III : Response to Survey

Agencies responding to survey	90%
Agencies with ISO police departments	28%
Agencies with school resource officers	65%
Agencies with no school police presence	7%

Of the areas with some type of police presence, ranging from what was estimated to be medium to large in size, and anywhere from under 10 to over 50 designated officers, all were asked if constant police presence in and on school campuses had noticeably lowered the crime rate on school properties. About 38% advised that yes, law enforcement on campuses had reduced crime. Approximately 11 % advised that it had not. About 50% were unsure or did not know of any impact.

Table IV: Response to Survey: Agencies responding when asked if police presence noticeably reduced crime on campus

38% advised yes 11 % advised no 50% unsure

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Since the 1950's crime has been on the rise in our nation's schools. Particularly, violent crimes have increased, which has led to students and school staff feeling unsafe and fearful of being the victim of possible aggression or violence at the hands of students or adults. Many schools nationwide have implemented programs of different types with varying degrees of success. This purpose of this research report has been to observe and report findings of programs and their successes over the past fifty years with the intent to determine if the efforts have been successful, and what combination of these are most instrumental in lending to safe school environments. Also, through this analysis it is intended to unearth some predictions of possible problems facing the future of providing for safe schools and for educational law enforcement.

It is hypothesized that although almost any efforts in prevention, intervention and enforcement that are utilized by school districts across the country are at least somewhat effective, certain efforts have reaped many more benefits and have been proven to be worth the sometimes disputed costs. School district police departments have shown to be the best tool in providing safety in education through not only law enforcement, but in prevention, intervention and building a stronger, common relationship with school staff, students and parents.

There is no common dispute to law enforcement in schools, although the public's opinion that crime in our schools is on the rise. This has more people addressing school authorities and law enforcement officials wanting to know what is to be done to combat it. School security has certainly helped but has limitations as far as powers and authority and historically security officers are hired to observe and be seen. Then if an incident occurs, law enforcement who do not have the every day relationship with the students and the administrators are brought in to deal with the incident and there can be some animosity created when the two

authorities do not agree on the proper protocol to settle the matter. Police generally arrest violators of the law objectively without consideration for other factors involved. School administrators frequently consider other factors in the students life before making a determination because they interact with the students daily.

School resource officers have proven to be effective in providing law enforcement services to schools and are very popular nationwide. These officers or deputies of local city or county law enforcement agencies are placed into the schools daily atmosphere to interact with students, teach some programs on prevention and intervention including but not limited to DARE or GREAT. Even though there are advantages to having police in the schools, it is still a precarious relationship built by two governmental entities where the officers serving in the programs are still commanded by police officials and do not feel the same ties to school officials. Commonly this makes administrators feel that their authority and decision making powers are usurped or limited on campuses that are their ultimate responsibility. Sometimes tense relationships lead to termination of contracts or services when law enforcement officials and school officials disagree on proper policy or procedure or on things such as officer wages or equipment use, use of force and possibly several other issues.

School district police departments are the state of the art solution to providing for safety and the provision of law enforcement services to America's schools. The main recurring hindrance to the development of more school police departments is the cost issue. It is known that the undertaking of the development of a police force requires a substantial budget devoted to salaries, training and equipment. However, as so many school districts nationwide can attest to , the benefits far outweigh the negatives. School district police are an integrated part of the schools and officers devote 100% of their duty to the school district police department which is under the

direction of the school superintendent and the school board. Through the school districts policies, the police department is set up to provide what the schools and the community feel will provide a safe and orderly educational environment. School police departments are active in school crisis management plans. School police officers have opportunities to develop working relationships with school administrators and staff and also with students, their parents and also the larger community through interaction. School police frequently designate a large amount of time and manpower developing and administering campus based crime prevention and other educational programs at all levels of education. This is not just a six or eight hour relationship, it is constant.

The available research and methods of gathering data have no doubt shown that crime and violence in schools is on the forefront of concern for the nation. Most schools have enacted some type of security or safety program and other measures to ensure the stable, safe learning environment of the future. The findings of this research have shown that school district police departments are on the rise and no doubt provide more services than any alternative. School resource officers still are more commonly used though. If the budgetary issues can be surpassed, which appear to be on the forefront of school district concerns, then the nation can look forward to the positive interaction between more school district police agencies and America's youth which will provide a safer educational environment and a positive future filled with learning and void of fear of crime.

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APPENDIX 1

NAME

PHONE

AGENCY

1.) NAME OF YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL DIST.

2.) SCHOOL DISTRICT SIZE; SMALL MEDIUM LARGE

3.) WHAT TYPE OF POLICE PRESENCE DOES YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT

MAINTAIN?

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER FROM CITY
OR COUNTY AGENCY

SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENT

- NONE-911 RESPONSE ONLY

4.) IF YOUR PREVIOUS ANSWER WAS NONE, DO YOU FEEL THAT YOUR
SCHOOL DISTRICT NEEDS AN I.S.D. POLICE DEPARTMENT?

YES NO

5.) APPROX. HOW MANY YEARS HAS THIS BEEN IN EXISTENCE?

LESS THAN TWO YEARS

TWO TO FIVE YEARS

FIVE YEARS +

6.) IF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS, HOW MANY DESIGNATED TO

DISTRICT_, HOW MANY TOTAL HOURS A DAY ARE DEVOTED TO
THE SCHOOL

APPENDIX 1

7.) IF SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEP'T., APPROX. HOW MANY SWORN

OFFICERS? UNDER 10

 10 TO 30

 30 TO 50

 50+

8.) HAS THE PRESENCE OF POLICE IN AND ON SCHOOL CAMPUSES

NOTICEABLY LOWERED OVERALL CRIME RATES ON SCHOOL
PROPERTIES? YES NO UNKNOWN

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION,

Sgt. Matthew J. Blakelock
Conroe ISD Police