

**THE BILL BLACKWOOD
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS**

Justification for the Implementation of a Criminal
Justice Curriculum at the High School Level

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Abstract

Law enforcement agencies have typically responded to problems in a reactionary manner, meaning that after a problem exists then it would be addressed by the agency. The new mindset in law enforcement is to have a proactive approach. This is when law enforcement addresses the cause of the problem and attempts to resolve the situation prior to the crime being committed. This new mind set has been dubbed "community oriented policing".

One innovative facet of this community oriented policing calls for the implementation of a criminal justice class at the local high school. The law enforcement officer who will be teaching this class will also serve as a school liaison officer where in he would assist the school officials with any matter that might need police intervention and thus maintain a proper learning environment for the student.

While at the high school his instruction and positive role model reinforcement will have a positive effect on the students thus breaking down the latent barrier that exists between the law enforcement officer and the public.

This class would also help cultivate any aspirations that interested students would have about a possible career in the criminal justice field.

We as law enforcement professionals need to re-instill a trust with the community by establishing a cohesive verbal exchange designed to obtain information from the community. This exchange would also serve to inform the community about the plans, actions, ideals and problems that law enforcement efforts are faced with on a day to day basis.

Introduction

The Bandera County Sheriff's Office is proposing the implementation of a criminal justice curriculum to be taught at the Bandera High School. This proposed class is a proactive experimental program that we feel would benefit the students, the school district and law enforcement efforts.

The objective of the class is threefold. First, we intend to develop the students knowledge of the local, state and federal criminal laws, their applications and the operations of the criminal justice procedure.

Secondly, We feel that having a uniformed deputy stationed at the high school would be a effective deterrent to criminal activity that would likely occur on a overcrowded campus. This uniformed "resource deputy" would be at the disposal of school officials to intervene in any breech of the peace or other disturbance at the school. He would also be charged with the instruction of the students in the criminal justice class.

And lastly, the offered class will introduce the students to possible avenues for future employment in the law enforcement or criminal justice fields.

In order to implement this curriculum we will need to have the support from a variety of sources and organizations. First, the Bandera County Sheriff's Office. We are totally dedicated to this project. We will provide a deputy to facilitate the class. The program will be reevaluated after one year and If after that time the program is determined to be successful then we will continue to maintain a deputy at the campus.

Second, criminal justice professionals need to be committed to this program. There is long list of officials from county, district, state and federal offices representing

law enforcement, judicial, correctional and supervision organizations that have volunteered their time to this project.

Third, we will need the support of the Bandera Independent School District board of directors, as well as the administrators, staff members and teachers of the Bandera High School.

Fourth, the community and media support will also be sought to stand behind and applaud the efforts of the students involved in the program.

And last but certainly not least we need the support of the parents of the students participating in the class. We need them to nurture the students enthusiasm and inspire their thoughts so their children can strive to be the best that they can and fulfill their dreams. I am certain that this curriculum will be beneficial to all parties involved and instead of a school system that only attempts to impose uniform rules and regulations, we will be a school that is dynamic, diverse, and accountable to our youth of today, our leaders of tomorrow.

Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context

"Statistics show crime levels falling in many areas of the country in recent years" (Ayers, 1) although the Uniform Crime Report indicates that "juvenile crime is on the rise nation wide" (Crime in the United States, 14). The mere numbers of juveniles that are predicted to enter into the juvenile probation system are staggering. "Demographers and sociologist predict an echo-boom of youngsters over the next decade that will dramatically expand the pool from which violent youthful offenders will emerge" (Walchak, 14). "The number of 15 to 17 year olds, now the most crime prone segment

of the population, is expected to grow rapidly over the next several years" (Walchak, 14).

The rise in juvenile crime is already apparent in Bandera County. Recently the Bandera County Commissioners Court approved the implementation of a fully staffed juvenile probation department. In previous years Bandera County contracted with the Medina County Juvenile Probation Office but the mere numbers of juvenile referrals made it economically feasible for the county to establish an entirely new department to maintain the juvenile offenders.

Historically when children are left without supervision or without the influence of a positive role model they become vulnerable to destructive or illegal behavior. In these days "The role of the family in directing the lives of emerging youth is weakening. Troubled youth often take their cues from peers, the media or even gangs" (Rosenblat, 21). Many youths are left unsupervised for a great amount of a day due mostly to the fact that many homes are either single parent households or economical needs require both parents to assume a working role outside the home. One of the techniques suggested to help children become productive, happy, and law-abiding citizens is the introduction of "community-oriented proactive policing programs that begin with the philosophy of prevention" (Stephens Youth, 7). Law enforcement now has an accountability to the community. It implies a new relationship to the community in which the police establish an understanding with the public. The only way to reach this understanding is to communicate to the community members on a one on one basis. "law enforcement officers can shape society by serving as positive, inspirational role models for young people. It requires work, time, imagination, and personal involvement,

but the rewards are everlasting" (Smith, 5). "Law enforcement officers can have a positive, long-lasting effect on today's youth, if only they will make the commitment" (Smith, 5).

Most citizens in this country, adults and children both, are ignorant to the criminal justice procedures unless they are employed in the system or have become a focus of an official proceeding or investigation.

The nature of law enforcement is changing. The "traditional policing theory was that police protect individuals by catching bad guys" (Carter, 2). "Far too often the contact between officers and citizens is made under negative or traumatic circumstances such as traffic stops, loss reports, and jail...to name a few" (Bryson, 1).

Now "the police must, if they are to be effective, assume an advocacy role for the community" (Goldstein, 47). They have to change from being the bad guy to becoming involved in their community. Community oriented policing programs are one of the most effective ways of bridging that gap between law enforcement and the community that it serves.

In many ways law enforcement is practiced differently in larger communities than it is in smaller areas. In addition to the probability of knowing the law enforcement officer on a first name basis "people from smaller communities were more likely to want police to perform a wide array of functions (Weisheit 66), and usually are more receptive to innovative programs that are designed to strengthen the social bond between the police and the public. The majority of law enforcement agencies are located in small rural areas, "79% of the police agencies in the United States employ 25 or fewer officers" (Cox, 1)

The best approach to solving crime and social problems is to anticipate them and prevent them from occurring" (Stephens Strategic, 153)

Review of literature or practice

Bandera county is a rural community with a population of approximately 20,000 inhabitants. The county is comprised of middle to low income households and there is a minimal number of businesses. The majority of the county is comprised of large ranches and farms, which accounts for a low tax base.

The geographical limits of Bandera County are within 30 miles of the city of San Antonio, which is the county seat for Bexar County. Bandera County and Bexar County actually have a contiguous border. The population of Bexar County is well over one million persons. A large number of the citizens who reside in Bandera County commute into the San Antonio metropolitan area every day to attend to business, school and professional endeavors.

The population of Bandera County has risen 20% in the last two years and is believed to be attributed to the large number of San Antonio residents who have "escaped" to live the country life.

This phenomena, which has been labeled as "urban flight syndrome" has caused an tremendous burden on the county government as well as the local school districts. The children of these commuting parents are now being left home alone, or at school, for a greater number of hours each day while the parents are traveling to and from work in San Antonio.

There are three school districts that administer to the education needs of the school-aged children in Bandera County. The largest district is the Bandera Independent School District, which covers the majority of the county. The other two school districts are the Medina Independent School District and the Utopia Independent School District.

The Bandera I.S.D. population, as well as the county population in general is growing at an alarming rate. Thus, the high school is close to the point of overcrowding and there are not enough teachers on staff to adequately handle the increased enrollment.

The Bandera I.S.D. covers 301 square miles, has two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. There are approximately 2173 students enrolled in the Bandera I.S.D. Up from 1722 two years ago. The Bandera High School has a population of 643 students, which is up from 533 two just years ago. Estimates of projected growth are ever increasing for both the county and the school district.

We as a school district and a law enforcement entity need to be ready for the expansion of youth growth and not be left behind. Not being properly prepared for this potential surge in juvenile crime may leave us at the starting blocks and then, possibly in a position where we would never be able to catch up.

Discussion of relevant issues

"A quiet revolution has taken place in communities across the nation. With law enforcement agencies offering an increasingly diverse menu of community policing programs" (Rachlin, 24). Community policing is a trend of the future and many

innovated law enforcement leaders see this trend as an effective way to curb the occurrences of crime within their communities. In a recent poll of selected law enforcement practitioners it was discovered that "91% indicated that they endorsed or subscribed to a community oriented policing philosophy" (Lyons, 4).

The Bandera County Sheriff's Office supports this belief and has always been in close contact with the citizens. Some experts suggest that "most departments with fewer than 25-30 officers already subscribe, by virtue of their environment, to community policing" (Cox, 1). Just from the mere fact that law enforcement officers from smaller agencies have more of an opportunity to openly communicate with it's citizens.

Agencies both large and small need to consider the benefits that can be realized from community policing. "Community policing is a new philosophy of policing, based on the concept that police officers and private citizens working together in creative ways can help solve contemporary community problems related to crime (Trojanowicz, 5).

"Law enforcement leaders seeking innovative ways to enhance performance and maximize resources have struck a responsive chord across the nation with a variety of community policing initiatives". (Papa, 14)

This proposed criminal justice program would be modeled after other programs that have been implemented throughout the nation that "stress academic achievement, personal responsibility, regular attendance, and the development of good habits and attitudes" (Wrightman, 37).

Programs similar to this have been established at other high schools in the country. One of these programs is located in Portland, Oregon. The Portland Police Department placed a "full time officer in the city's high schools who teaches a law

focused education program which promotes law enforcement careers to students during their formative years (Sharp, 102). The program is designed to assist students transition through high school into college or technical schools, to assume adult and leadership roles in our communities.

This criminal justice training program would "give the students an opportunity to see that the police are not their enemies, and it gives the police the opportunity to become involved with a very important part of our community" (Siska, 33).

In order to prepare our leaders and professionals of tomorrow we need to educate our students of today. There is still a need for academics but we should also provide students with a "curriculum that has to do with technology and the humanities" (Hornaday, 2).

A proper well rounded education should include the basics of reading, writing and math but it should also be "strongly encouraged to wrestle with ideas, explore them, challenge them, students should be taught to evaluate data and make discerning judgements about the selected topic" (Tripp,97). There is no doubt that whenever a discussion about law, punishment or the criminal justice system should arise within a stimulated and intuitive group, that these issues could be vigorously addressed.

The proposed educational plan will provide a "in-depth study of the law enforcement function and the judicial, legislative, and corrections branches of government" (Wilson, 21).

it is becoming clear that "nontraditional police services in schools are a key to reducing violence" (Rosenblat, 22). Rather than viewing law enforcement as a last resort for "intervention in the prevention of crime, school and criminal justice leaders

should intensify the use of law enforcement personnel in these non-traditional roles and regard them as a positive presence in schools" (Rosenblat, 22).

The positive effects that surface when students and law enforcement officers develop a one on one relationship may be un-measurable but is an intangible benefit to the children, the officers and the community.

Another type of community oriented policing is the DARE program. Locally the DARE program is already established in the local elementary schools and middle school. More than 30 studies from around the world clearly demonstrate "DARE's effectiveness in preventing drug, alcohol and tobacco use" (Siska, 31). We feel that this proposed criminal justice course would act as an reinforcement program for the older children while at the high school level.

We will achieve this by using the positive characteristics of the criminal justice system as a foundation and the police-training academy as a teaching model. "High school students can be provided quality information about our system of government, way of life, interaction in our community, and concerns for others to improve the quality of the decisions they make, their use of good judgement, their self esteem, their chance as adults to become successful leaders and productive members of our community" (Rudewick).

Criminal justice professionals from the following agencies have already indicated their support of a youth police career path to provide children with police role models in their developmental years. These agencies include, but are not limited to:

- Texas Rangers
- Texas Highway Patrol
- Federal Bureau Of Investigations
- Texas Parks And Wildlife-Game Warden,

Bandera County Constables Office
Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission
Bandera County Attorney's Office
Bandera County Judge
216th District Attorney's Office
216th District Judge's Office
Bandera County Juvenile Probation Office
Bandera County Adult Probation Office
Texas Department Of Criminal Justice-Parole Office
Fabian Dominguez State Jail

Conclusions/Recommendations

Many children have stereotypical ideas and beliefs about law enforcement officers and criminal justice officials. Through this class the students would be introduced to a variety of criminal justice professionals that are going to participate in the program as guest speakers, lecturers, regular instructors and mentors. In addition, many youths do not understand the law and need to be educated about the law before they enter into the work force. "While traditional government, history and social studies classes touch upon the major themes that underpin the legal system, they rarely explore the more practical aspects" (Murdo, 19) that a law enforcement officer could expose the students to.

Another possible benefit of the high school criminal justice class is a base line training initiative for future officers. Law enforcement departments across the country , Including the Bandera County Sheriff's Office, are "finding it difficult to find any qualified applicants today" (Sharp, 100). This program may inspire and nurture a students interest in law enforcement that may otherwise go untapped.

Due to the frequency of assaults, thefts, and drug use the need for police presence at many high schools has become common place. Although the aforementioned problems are still a rarity rather than the norm at the Bandera High School the increasing population can only increase the reasonable probability that these type of offense will develop as the enrollment grows.

The deputy assigned to the criminal justice program would also serve as a school liaison officer. His presence in the school would be a learning and community resource for school administrators, teachers, and students. "Here the officer might teach a course on crime problems or police operations, assist teachers in the preparation of course materials related on law enforcement and criminal justice, or meet informally with students to discuss issues that are of concern to them" (Thibault, 132). The majority of the population of the county during a routine school day can be found on our campuses. Just the mere fact that we should provide adequate law enforcement protection for these younger citizens is cause enough to warrant a school resource officer at the high school campus in its-self.

This course has been approved by the Texas Education Commission and would qualify under the TEC-PREP standards. A TEC-PREP class is administered in either the eleventh or twelfth grades in high school as an elective course. This course will be accepted at a wide array of junior colleges as an elective to be used toward a college degree.

The Bandera County Sheriff's Office is going to absorb the costs associated with this program with the intent to apply and receive financial assistance from a government funded community oriented policing grant. We feel that this program is so necessary

and justified that if the funds are not obtained from a grant we will continue to station a deputy at the school as long as the need is warranted.

At the completion of the semester it is expected that "whether or not the graduates pursue a career in a criminal justice field, they will possess a deeper understanding and more realistic perspective of the challenges facing the criminal justice system" (Wilson, 24). It is anticipated that they will also exhibit a heightened awareness of the intricacies of the criminal justice system, making them more informed, productive and law abiding citizens.

By establishing and implementing this initiative it is the desire of the Bandera County Sheriff and his deputies, that the ultimate mission of the criminal justice curriculum at the high school be designed to help students successfully transition through high school, assume adult roles, and become productive members of our community.

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