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A Crowd Control Management Policy for Middle and High School  
Athletics

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## ABSTRACT

Brownsville Independent School District is a large school district (42,000 students) having 5 high schools and 11 middle schools each has its own athletic program, and over 350 students who participate in football and basketball. They affect many vital aspects of crowd-control management policy and practice. For this reason, the need to formulate a comprehensive crowd-control management policy for our school district was investigated. According to the findings clearly, suggest making a risk appraisal in crowd control policymaking and review current safety procedures.

In order to appraise the potential impact of a crowd-control management policy, a telephone survey is utilized to compare Brownsville's ISD police department with that of similar size school district police agencies. Three school districts police chiefs were contacted and opinions gathered indicated a concern of not having a comprehensive crowd-control policy.

It is concluded that effective crowd-control policies be well written and be appropriate for enforcement, and responsibilities should be well-defined.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 1999-2000 school years, the Brownsville Independent school district reported a total student population of over 40,000 students. This school district has 5 high schools and 10 middle schools. Each has its own athletic program, and over 350 students who participate in football. The school district police department received over 1400 requests for police services at all athletic events. Additional local law enforcement officers were contracted to assist the local department due to the high number of events and crowd control concerns. Local law enforcement officers are assigned to each football, basketball, soccer, and baseball games. Obviously, under these conditions it becomes increasingly important that careful attention is given to the creation of a comprehensive crowd control policy for all athletic events at Brownsville I.S.D.

This project will investigate how the Brownsville Independent School District Police Department can formulate policies concerning crowd control issues at scholastic events. The project will include three stages of implementation and recommendations. First, it is necessary to contact the Lower Rio Grande Valley Regional School districts, i.e. McAllen I.S.D.; Harlingen I.S.D., and Corpus Christi I.S.D. police departments to determine how can a crowd control policy will assist Brownsville Independent School District police department in

planning, organizing, and supervising at a middle and high school athletic events to determine if they have a crowd management policy. Second, the research will address legal issues on crowd control liabilities; and what are the legal principles and implications for implementing a crowd control policy. Finally, the project will address what are the advantages and disadvantages for enacting and enforcing a crowd control policy at all athletic events.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Effective crowd control can best be accomplished through a systematic approach to include pre-game, during the game and post-event procedures that assist schools in preparing adequately for crowd control at athletic events, as well as policy guidelines to control middle and high school sports crowds. According to Bessmer (1989) the connotation of crowd control refers to "the forcible movement of large groups of people from place to place or the control of large groups of people in a particular place." The research suggests that pre-planning procedures in crowd control logically should start many weeks before an event, especially football games. According to Bromely (1984), there are some factors to consider in assuring security for student events on campus. He stresses the idea that there is " a logical sequence of dividing the sporting event into three areas: procedure before an event, procedures during an event, and procedures after an event."

Crowd control planning procedures before an event include traffic flow to and following the game, and around the area during the game. It also includes traffic direction and control, and possibly posting NO PARKING directional signs to assist pedestrian flow. Other research suggests combining a comprehensive crowd control procedure with a crowd management policy along with guidelines to control high school and middle

school sports crowds. Special attention should be paid to people who do not come to a game to watch it. They are a potential source of trouble. According to the related literature, a comprehensive crowd-control policy is critical (Brethapt, 1992). As one author noted, a school event expands in importance to become a community event, however, it is still a school function as far as the courts are concerned (Thorne, 1983).

Another area of concern among experts is that, although crowd management is a fundamental and critical task at any sporting event, in many cases schools fail to follow legal guidelines, creating liability. And according to one author legally, liability is an extension of accountability (Foster, 1980). Although a school is responsible for crowd control, it is liable for injuries only if the school has not met its supervisory duties in a reasonable manner. At different events levels of supervision would be different (Peterson, 1980). Adequate supervision would be different for a choral recital than for a football championship.

According to the literature clearly the advantages of having crowd control policies outweigh disadvantages of NOT having a comprehensive crowd control policy at school events. It is paramount that every school district employ pre-planning and that the team concept within the community be in its course of action (Sandora, 1989).

Research suggests that a complete and comprehensive review of current policies must be done when making a risk assessment in crowd control policies and special attention should be paid to management accountability (Brewer, 1990). Crowd safety is primarily a management responsibility and requires the application of the best practices of health and safety management (Newman, 1999). Newman further suggests that all who organize school events or manage school sports, which attract crowds, should have a health and safety management team that anticipates, monitors and controls potential crowding risks (Newman, 1999).



## METHODOLOGY

This project investigates how the Brownsville Independent School District Police Department can formulate policies concerning crowd control issues at scholastic events. This research should show that there is a need for more planning, organizing, and supervising crowds at Brownsville I.S.D. sporting events because of old and outdated policies and problems that arise due to them. The intended analysis of this project is to provide the Brownsville I.S.D. Police Chief with information on which to base a revision of the department's current policy concerning crowd control at all athletic events. The result of such a revision should conclude that there is a direct relationship in planning, organizing and supervising crowds at Brownsville I.S.D. sporting events.

Telephone surveys were conducted of the following regional school districts: McAllen I.S.D., Harlingen I.S.D., and Corpus Christi I.S.D. police departments. They were asked how a crowd control policy could assist the police department in planning, organizing, and supervising at middle and high school athletic events. The survey also addressed legal issues on crowd control liabilities, legal principles, and fiscal implications for implementing a crowd control policy.

Finally, the project also addresses what the advantages and disadvantages are for enacting and enforcing a crowd control policy at all athletic events.

## FINDINGS

Crowd safety is primarily a management responsibility and requires the application of the best practices of health and safety management. Information obtained from journals showed that the use of policy guidelines to control school sports crowds should have a health and safety management system, which anticipates monitors and controls potential crowding risks. The management of crowds requires teamwork with good communication and co-ordination between those responsible for the overall operation and those managing crowds face to face (Brewer, 1990). Another finding indicated that effective team work depends on management providing a positive and pro-active safety culture so that staff at all levels are aware of the importance of crowd safety at school sporting events (Bromely, 1994).

In 1983 an article on crowd control policy making suggested school boards address and carefully create crowd-control policy at extracurricular events, which included legal guidelines that are effective and comprehensive. A school district is responsible for controlling behavior at any school sponsored activity, whether that activity is in a playing field, or in a leased facility, schools are responsible for the behavior of the students present, as well as for the behavior of the nonstudents in attendance (Thorne, 1983).

Also apparent is the emphasis placed on crowd-control policies paying attention to the worst possible situations. If school districts do not act in creating crowd-control policy guidelines with these standards, an additional liability may accrue. Some courts have held that a school might be negligent if it does not carefully create crowd-control policies (Peterson, 1980).

In conducting telephone surveys of the Harlingen I.S.D., McAllen I.S.D., and the Corpus Christi I.S.D. Police Departments regarding crowd control issues specifically whether their departments had comprehensive crowd control policy's for athletic events, Chief Bob Morales of the Harlingen Independent School District security department said he favored and recognized the importance of a comprehensive crowd-control policy (Personal communication, May 2002). Although, he favored such a policy, the Harlingen Independent School is not currently working under such a policy but they are "researching" the issue.

Chief Chris Esquivel of the McAllen ISD Police Department said he also favors a comprehensive crowd control policy (Personal communication, May 2002). Chief Esquivel said that his department is currently with University Interscholastic League rules and regulations, which means; however, his school district is responsible for enacting and enforcing a crowd management

policy for contests sponsored by McAllen ISD. Although his district favors a comprehensive crowd management policy, Chief Esquivel said his staff would "review" his current policy and compare it with other school systems. He favored a system including variations to fit their own unique situation.

Chief Al Ortiz of the Corpus Christi Independent School District Police Department said that they are in the "process" of putting together a policy for all sporting events (Personal communication, May 2002). Their school district has a system by which each high school and middle school is responsible for developing a "master plan" for management of crowds. Chief Ortiz said that during the varsity football game season, administrative duties for controlling crowds involves his department and each campus administrator participating in the planning process.

### Conclusions

This research investigated how the Brownsville Independent School District Police Department (BISD) should formulate policies concerning crowd control issues at scholastic events. This project is to provide the Brownsville I.S.D. Police Chief with information on which to base a revision of the department's current policy concerning crowd control at all athletic events. Brownsville ISD police department's current policy was compared to that of several similar agencies. The evidence suggests that significant change is necessary to BISD-Police Department's crowd control planning policies to increase effectiveness and reduce liability.

First, it is recommended that BISD-Police Department crowd control policy address the need to form effective team work by providing a positive and pro-active safety culture so that staff at all levels are aware of the importance of crowd safety at all athletic events. In particular, the team needs clear roles and responsibilities, written arrangements for the regular analysis, planning, supervision, operation and review of crowd safety systems and adequate training.

Next, it is recommended that BISD-Police department crowd control planning include prevention and research. It should take into account the type of crowd they expect and likely crowd behavior. Management should then also collate and assess

information about the health and safety record of previous events and conduct a risk assessment to decide the adequacy of arrangements in place to control crowds and change them if necessary.

Finally, it is recommended that BISD-Police departments crowd control planning include inspection of the venue and consistant of review crowd safety arrangements at regular intervals and network with outside law enforcement and emergency services. Brownsville's school district police department will appreciate a comprehensive crowd control planning policy, as it will better help us in planning, organizing, and supervising all athletic events. The research does support my hypothesis, as shown by my telephone interviews with the police chiefs from Harlingen ISD, McAllen ISD, and Corpus Christi ISD, the chief's were in favor of formulating comprehensive crowd control planning polices and stated it gave them additional support when supervising, planning, and organizing athletic events.

Crowd control at all athletic events is primarily a management responsibility and requires the application of the best practices of health and safety management. Although there are not many surveys done on how school districts and their law enforcement agencies feel about crowd control management and polices this research has shown how some feel about it and

learned from it. Preventing the unexpected from becoming a disaster depends on good management systems and experience.



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