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# School Safety



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**NATIONAL  
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CENTER**



Pepperdine University's National School Safety Center is a partnership of the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education. NSSC's goal is to promote school safety, improve discipline, increase attendance, and suppress drug traffic and abuse in all our nation's schools.

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## School Safety

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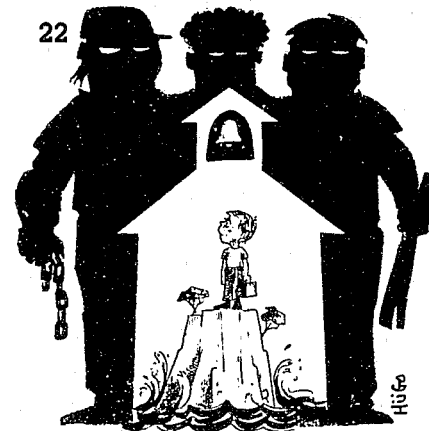
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**About the cover:**

This statue in front of the Philadelphia Police Administration Building exemplifies the positive relationship needed between law enforcers and youth. Photograph by Greg Lanier.

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ACQUISITIONS

BY TIMOTHY D. CROWE

*The traditional, active roles of law enforcement and schools in our communities will improve safety and the service to troubled youth.*

## Tradition prevails in school security

Misconceptions, fostered by a series of youthful offender studies dating from the late 1960s, have weakened the traditional roles educators and law enforcement officers play in providing effective supervision and control of youth in the community. After nearly two decades, the folly of this shift in public policy is apparent, but restoring the system is a difficult task.

Over the past 20 years school and police systems have been restructured until they now have very limited powers in the area of juvenile discipline and control. Many new teachers and police officers have entered these professions since this change, and new supervisory personnel have assumed leadership roles in a system that is limited in what it can do. They must also now contend with today's parents, who are hesitant to allow much flexibility in disciplining their children. Essentially, schools now use suspension and expulsion to control unruly children, while police await serious delinquent behavior or the commission of a heinous offense to justify their intervention.

While there is a shift in public attitude toward restoring to educators and law officers greater responsibility for supervising youth, this may take con-

siderable time, time society may not be able to afford.

A major cause of the weakening of school and police programs was a series of studies that seemed to support the contention that formal police contact, school disciplinary activities and institutional programs exacerbated bad behavior. For example, it was determined young persons sent to reform school did worse upon release than those placed on probation. Reform school, it was concluded, caused crime. Nearly everybody accepted the common belief that children only learned how to be crooks from their associations in reform school. The theory that youths went to reform school because their actions were worse than those who were placed on probation had little acceptance.

Another widely held belief was that young people would behave worse if they were described in negative terms, so new labeling was devised. Hence, a juvenile delinquent was renamed a "correctional client." Euphemisms were the rule.

However confusing the issues were, the net result was the establishment of official policy which diverted young people from the juvenile justice system and restricted disciplinary practices of educational institutions. The folly of the era produced several assumptions which do not hold up under examination.

*Assumption:* Children are victimized

most often at home and at the hands of adults.

*Fact:* The recent public attention to the terrible problems of child abuse and abduction have overshadowed a kind of child victimization much greater in magnitude. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice, a 1983 national survey disclosed the percentages of children and teen-age victimizations occurring at the following locations: on street, park or playground, 36 percent; at school, 24 percent; at or near home, 14 percent; in parking lots, 9 percent; in commercial, office areas, 6 percent; unknown or other, 12 percent. The survey revealed young people were victims of crime most often in school or on playgrounds.

The 1978 Safe School Study conducted by the National Institute of Education of the U.S. Department of Education revealed that 40 percent of robberies and 36 percent of assaults against urban youths took place in schools. The risks were highest for children aged 12 to 15.

National crime surveys conducted between 1973 and 1977 revealed juveniles aged 12 to 19 were seven times more likely to be victimized by other juveniles than the next oldest age group (20-34). That is, juveniles are victimized predominantly by other juveniles. It is more disturbing to learn juveniles are the most victimized segment of our

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population and are the least likely to report the offense.

*Assumption:* Parents, school officials, teachers and police cause most juvenile crime by creating unattainable expectations for young people.

*Fact:* Criminologists, sociologists, psychologists and political scientists have argued for years about the causes of juvenile crime. Many theories have been extremely competitive – and contradictory. None has been determined completely valid. It is conceivable that American definitions of success are unrealistic, but some basic facts refute the contention that parents and officials cause most juvenile crime.

The truth is, nearly all children get into trouble during their adolescence, without regard to their families' social position. Nearly all children grow up to be law abiding and productive citizens, having developed positive behavior through the process of maturation. Only a very small number of children and adults account for the majority of serious crime. The real issue is whether or not there is a distinct difference between most young people and the few who progressively lose control.

In *Crime and Human Nature*, authors Wilson and Hernstein argue against the theory of purely social causes of delinquent behavior, that delinquency is caused by a weakened, chaotic or broken family, ineffective schools, gangs, racism, poverty or unemployment. The authors cite evidence to support the contention that "the causes of crime lie in a combination of predisposing biological traits channeled by social circumstance into criminal behavior. The traits alone do not inevitably lead to crime; the circumstances do not make criminals of everyone; but, together they create a population responsible for a large fraction of America's problem of crime in the streets."

The authors propose programs for early identification, prevention and special help for these individuals.

The 1978 Safe Schools Study by the National Institute for Education, and

a series of follow-up studies, consistently emphasize that discipline, control, fair procedures and predictable consequences have the strongest influence in reducing disruptive behavior and crime in our schools. Therefore, it is more likely the absence of control by authority figures, rather than its presence, has the most to do with causing juvenile crime.

*Assumption:* Serious, violent or chronic juvenile offenders seldom are found in regular programs or classrooms in schools.

*Fact:* In Oxnard, California, 31 percent of the serious habitual juvenile offenders are enrolled in school. In Jacksonville, Florida, 54 percent of the same category are enrolled. Our children often attend school with habitual juvenile offenders. Many school super-

intendents are unaware of the status of these children, or they are afraid of being sued if they share the information with other agencies. These troubled, problem or delinquent children officially are invisible until they commit an extremely serious crime.

concerns of lawsuits or negative parental response.

Traditionally police spent 85 percent of their time on order maintenance and crisis services and only 15 percent on crime related activities. It was a basic understanding and mission of police to prevent and control juvenile crime, using the courts only where punishment was needed. August Vollmer, one of the early leaders in the development of contemporary police systems, wrote in the 1930s that the primary role of the police in handling juvenile crime was to prevent, divert and rehabilitate juvenile offenders. Arrest and legal sanctions were to be used only when all else failed.

Since the late 1960s police juvenile programs and services have been reduced or eliminated. Yet because of the

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*The authors cite evidence to support the contention that "the causes of crime lie in a combination of predisposing biological traits channeled by social circumstance into criminal behavior."*

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intendents are unaware of the status of these children, or they are afraid of being sued if they share the information with other agencies. These troubled, problem or delinquent children officially are invisible until they commit an extremely serious crime.

*Assumption:* The roles of the schools and the police in controlling delinquency are limited legally and traditionally to suspension, expulsion and arrest.

*Fact:* Schools are among the oldest institutions in the United States, and the school's right and responsibility to control and discipline children has been upheld traditionally by the legal concept "in loco parentis," meaning literally "in the place of the parent." A once broad range of disciplinary powers has been weakened through legal decisions and by redefining public policy. School officials now are more reluctant to discipline and control children out of

failure of community oriented prevention and diversion programs, policy-makers are recommending a return to traditional police practices in dealing with delinquent youth.

*Assumption:* Conventional probation and parole functions involve constant supervision and contact with juvenile offenders in the community.

*Fact:* John Augustus, a Boston shoemaker, developed a volunteer probation service in 1841. Private probation services sprang up in urban areas until the end of the 19th century when juvenile courts were established. In the early 20th century police departments were ordered by juvenile judges to assume probation services, and this led to the establishment of juvenile units within police agencies. Although probation services eventually were separated from police agencies, adult and juvenile probation officers were given full peace officer status and carried weapons until

the early 1960s.

It was estimated in a 1983 Bureau of Statistics report that 381,194 juveniles were under probation or parole supervision, compared to 71,792 juveniles in confinement. This represents a significant savings to the community because the expense of probation supervision usually is less than 20 percent of the cost of incarceration.

The object of probation or parole is either to leave an offender in the community or to return him under certain restrictions. Ideally the probation officer is to provide service in counseling and rehabilitation. In practice, however, high caseloads and limited or no coordination between schools, police and probation result in a passive system of supervision.

When probation officers are uninformed about disciplinary infractions in school or police reprimands or arrests, it reduces their ability to require appropriate behavior. Without active field supervision and cooperation among agencies, probation counselors cannot provide effective supervision.

*Assumption:* Current laws are the main obstacles preventing police, school, social service and juvenile justice officials from sharing information needed to work together effectively.

*Fact:* While this is a commonly expressed complaint by some police, school probation and social service staff, it was disproved by a 1983 study by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Results of the study, which reviewed the laws in all 50 states, failed to confirm the existence of serious restrictions or impediments.

In a recent study by the National Center for Education Statistics, it was determined only a small number of school principals considered case law and Supreme Court rulings burdensome. Instead, they cited lack of understanding of procedures as the problem.

It appears the laws are not a major impediment to cooperation among

police, schools, probation departments and the courts. Rather, inattentiveness, confusion and lack of communication are the obstacles to jointly and effectively addressing juvenile problems.

#### **Authority and action**

Children spend up to 25 percent of their waking hours in school. It is estimated another 18 percent is spent in the company of other children and the television likely occupies another 18 percent. Law enforcers and educators may be the only authority figures, aside from their parents, identified by many children. Therefore, the roles of teachers and police officers, as surrogates and supporters of parental supervision, become critical to the community concept of delinquency prevention and control.

Many activities and services can be implemented to improve the performance of the school and police in protecting children and controlling misbehavior. Most rely on existing capabilities and require no additional resources.

For example, municipal or county law enforcement agencies may develop special crime analysis and habitual offender files; coordinate interagency activities and services for habitual offenders; prepare profiles for habitual offenders; conduct immediate radio checks of a juvenile's prior police contacts for patrol officers; document reprimands and non-arrest situations on field interrogation cards or juvenile citations; assist in the control of probationers and follow-up on habitual truancy cases; supply regularly updated lists of designated habitual offenders to all law enforcers; and notify parents of field contacts and reprimands.

School districts may implement policies which define a legally acceptable code of conduct and set of disciplinary procedures; identify the school assignment of students classified as habitual offenders by local authorities; share disciplinary code violations and other

pertinent data with law enforcers and other officials designated as responsible for profiling habitual delinquents; separate designated habitual offenders by assigning them to different schools; notify principals and teachers of the presence and special needs of identified habitual offenders while avoiding discriminatory treatment of these students; and assist probation and law enforcers with the proper supervision of probationers.

Social service agencies may identify or establish special service and placement opportunities for drug, alcohol or behaviorally troubled habitual offenders; share case histories or diagnostic information with appropriate officials and participate on case management teams to control habitual offenders in the community; request police patrol and crime analysis follow-up on neglect, abuse and other problem cases; and provide case support for obtaining civil commitments of troubled, problem or delinquent youth designated as habitual offenders.

Recent court decisions require schools to administer fair disciplinary rules, which may cover violations of administrative codes through truancy and up to the commission of major felonies. School officials may conduct reasonable searches when they suspect a rule has been broken. *New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, 105 S.Ct. 733 (1985) provides guidelines for school searches. *Goss v. Lopez*, 419 U.S. 565 (1975) specifies clear procedures for suspensions.

The discretionary actions of law enforcers are authorized by state legislation. The word "discretion" means police are authorized to do something other than make an arrest when they observe a juvenile commit an offense or if they have reason to believe an offense has been committed.

It seems that a return to the more active and traditional roles of school and law enforcement will improve the safety and order of our communities and the service provided to troubled youngsters. □