



## Successful Practices & Strategies

Vol. 1 | No. 6

# Hopkins Police Department

Hopkins, Minnesota

[www.hopkinsmn.com/police](http://www.hopkinsmn.com/police)

### Community policing element

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Community partnerships

### Problem/issue

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School-based policing

### Problem description

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Youth violence problem

### Community policing strategies implemented

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The Hopkins Police Department (HPD) helped create “Operation Recess,” an initiative unlike any in the nation, where officers play with youth at recess.

HPD officers, in partnership with school staff, had implemented a SARA process of problem solving to analyze the issue. Through analysis, it became clear that most issues were stemming from incidents on the playground. HPD officers presented their “Operation Recess” idea first to the school counselors, who loved it. An initial meeting was set up to present the idea to school administrators, who stated, “This is awesome. Can you start today?”

Police and school counselors then set out to develop the pilot project and created a model. This model involved patrol officers spending one day per week at each of the two elementary schools for three hours during recess and playing games with youth on the playground. The patrol captain was responsible for posting overtime sheets in the roll call room, asking for officers to sign up for these shifts. A contingency plan for rain days was put into place where officers would then visit the classrooms to play bullying prevention games or do yoga under the direction of instructors with youth in the gym.

Officers at recess were not to be in uniform but would instead wear specially made T-shirts with the Operation Recess logo. Hopkins police were not to be the rule enforcers on the playground; they were strictly there to play and model cooperative problem-solving behavior and bullying intervention techniques, if need be. If there is a problem that needs addressing, officers notify an adult supervisor on the playground, known as a paraprofessional, or Para.

Once the model was created, a plan for implementation was developed. School staff created a kit for officers that included information regarding peaceful games, game rules, and key school



policies/procedures (e.g., where to check in, schedules for grade level recess periods, and school staff contact information). Officers could pass this kit to other officers as they participated each week.

An initial training session with the first participating officers was conducted by the school principals. Officers were introduced to key staff in the building and shown the behind-the-scenes operations at each school. Every week, participating officers were responsible for training the oncoming participants and sent e-mails describing how the day went and shared any key discoveries and success stories with all police staff.

### Change and/or impact as a result of these community policing efforts

Analysis of raw quantitative data began when the pilot program concluded June 9, 2012. Initial review of this data has shown that almost every officer in the department has participated in touching the lives of more than 1200 elementary youth over the course of nine weeks. Officers have given 54 hours of service to the school in this pilot phase of the initiative. These are staff resources that the school would not have been able to supply otherwise.

Written disciplinary reports have significantly decreased in this time period, averaging from 15 a week to only 5. Only one incident occurred on the days when officers were present. There have been no instances of families obtaining court-awarded restraining orders for their children due to bullying instances in school and the neighborhood; however, disagreements have continued in the neighborhoods before and after school, and the HPD is looking at ways to adapt the program to address this problem.

Plans for a formal evaluation of Operation Recess are being made now that there is a solid school year of implementation. It is important to have this information as we move forward in securing additional funding to support the initiative.

### Lessons learned through program implementation

When a police agency or any other community organization attempts to work with a school system, it can be a daunting and seemingly impossible task. To implement new programs is difficult because classroom time is guarded, and the policies and procedures are highly structured.

However, it does not mean that new initiatives cannot be attempted; it means that a deeply rooted trust must be in place prior to posing ideas, and the partners within the school system must be involved in creating and implementing the initiative. Once initiatives are developed, to be successful, especially in a school setting, police and school administrators (chiefs and principals) must be fully supportive to the point that they are cheerleaders for the initiative and encourage excitement for participation.



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Published 2014