

**The School Based Partnership in Arlington, Texas
Local-Level Evaluation Results**

By

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The School Based Partnership Project in Arlington, TX

Background

The Arlington (TX) Police Department received its School Based Partnership grant from the COPS Office in 1998. The department chose to work with the Arlington Independent School District, specifically Sam Houston High School on the problem of student truancy and its effect on the school and the environment.

Arlington City Police Department

The Arlington Police Department serves a population of nearly 300,000 in Tarrant County, TX. From 1997 to 2000 the department increased its sworn force by about 5 percent and its civilian force by 11 percent.

Demographics	1997	1998	1999	2000
Number of Sworn officers	484	493	497	507
Number of civilian Employees	149	149	158	166

Community Based Policing History and Details

The Arlington Police Department adopted a community oriented policing philosophy in 1987. This philosophy is based on the fundamental understanding that the police department is in partnership with the community to identify and solve the problems. In 1996, the department further enhanced its commitment by implementing a geographic policing strategy within the department and throughout the community. Geographic policing stresses community problem-solving through decentralization of officer assignments and 24-hour beat accountability. The success of these efforts is dependent upon the cooperation of the police and the community to jointly identify and solve problems.

Through geographic policing, the Arlington Police Department utilizes numerous strategies to communicate and encourage its community-oriented philosophy. These strategies include:

1. Store-front policing: The police department implemented its first storefront operation in 1991 and has opened and staffed three additional storefronts.
2. Bicycle, scooter, and foot patrols: Officers assigned to bike, scooter, and foot patrols are assigned to high density housing areas, retail shopping areas, and other entertainment areas. Of note is the South Cooper Street Corridor District, one of the busiest retail shopping centers in the state, which bicycle and scooter officers patrol full-time.
3. School Programs: In partnership with the Arlington Independent School District, the police department provides both School Resource and DARE Programs to the youth of the city. The Youth Service Program includes 16 School Resource Officers, 9 DARE Officers and 3 Sergeants who provide service to more than 63,000 AISD students.

Currently, there are numerous active projects, initiatives, and community partnerships that seek to address and solve community issues and problems. The Arlington Police Department sponsors and participates with more than 270 crime watch groups citywide. The department was awarded the *National Night Out Award* for the 13th consecutive year. In addition, there are currently 10 active Citizens on Patrol groups that work closely with beat officers to identify and solve problems in our neighborhoods. The department also continues to offer the Citizen Police Academy, High School Citizen Police Academy, and the Spanish Citizen Police Academy.

Beat officers' work closely with a variety of special groups throughout the city. The City of Arlington hosts one of the most active Apartment Manager's Coalitions in the Metroplex area. This group meets monthly to discuss various issues within the apartment communities, as well as share and exchange information. In 2000, the police department implemented a Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program Utilizing CPTED concept. This program encourages apartment management and property owners to take a proactive stance toward crime preventions in multi-family and apartment complexes.

The School Based Partnership Project

Participants

For the School-Based Partnership project, the Arlington PD worked closely with Sam Houston High School and the University of Texas. The following people participated fully in the SBP Project:

Lieutenant Lisa Womack	Project Director	Arlington P.D.
Debra Carney	Research Analyst	Arlington P.D.
Rickey Kempe	Principal, SHHS	Arlington, I.S.D.*
Charles Lester	Asst. Principal, SHHS	Arlington, I.S.D.*
Eric Smedema	Attendance Officer, SHHS	Arlington, I.S.D.*
Toshua Williams	SRO, SHHS	Arlington, P.D.*
Carrie Harter	Research Consultant	UTA

Others also participated in selected portions of the project:

SHHS Student Council	Asst. Principal, SHHS	Arlington, I.S.D.
La Juan Grammar	School Resource Officer	Arlington, I.S.D.
Chavela Hampton	School Resource Officer	Arlington, P.D.
Don Kingen	School Resource Officer	Arlington, P.D.
Mario Gomez	School Resource Officer	Arlington, P.D.*
Jeff Lee	School Resource Officer	Arlington, P.D.
Christa Roan	School Resource Officer	Arlington, P.D.*
Teresa (Kebart) Lopez	School Resource Officer	Arlington, P.D.
School Resource Unit		Arlington, P.D.
East Patrol Division	Day and Evening Shifts	Arlington, P.D.

*No longer employed in listed position

Sam Houston High School

Sam Houston High School includes 2,546 students and 214 teachers, administrators, and clerical staff. Sam Houston High School is populated by a large minority student population -- almost 70% are minorities.

1998-1999 School Year		1999-2000 School Year	
Students	2397	Students	2546
Administrators	14	Administrators	16
Teachers	141	Teachers	160
Clerical Staff	40	Clerical Staff	38

Past Relationship With Police

The Arlington Police Department has had a strong relationship with the Arlington Independent School District for a very long time through the School Resource Program. The School Resource Program began in the late 1970's with 2 grant-funded positions. Since that time, the program has expanded to 16 officers and 2 sergeants. The 1997-98 school year saw the first assignment of the School Resource Officers (SRO) full-time at the high school level. Prior to that year, SRO's were assigned to each junior high school campus with assistance provided to the high school on a part time basis.

Sam Houston High School (SHHS) has enjoyed and fostered a strong relationship with each SRO assigned to the campus. A critical incident occurred on the campus during the 1997-98 school year that required the police and the school district to work together to address community concerns. That incident proved to further strengthen the working relationship between the two entities. The SRO routinely works with school staff to address of on- and off- campus crimes relating to students, faculty, and staff. In addition, SHHS administrative staff members meet with police department patrol division supervisors several times throughout each school year to discuss neighborhood and community issues.

Major Issues in the School

For the 1998-1999 school year, it was determined that one of the major issues facing Sam Houston High School was the rising truancy rate and reduction in overall school attendance. Besides the truancy and non-attendance issues, other factors were also present. During 1998-99, there were a total of 142 incidents reported to the police at Sam Houston High School. Of that, 80 percent- 85 percent were misdemeanor level incidents including: fighting, assaults, disorderly, conduct, criminal mischief, and criminal trespassing. Felony level offenses included: aggravated assault, motor vehicle theft, and possession of a controlled substance. While no particular trends or patterns were noted in any of these categories, gang activity was a prevalent concern as a contributing factor. Responses to the truancy / student non-attendance issues were implemented during the 1999-00 school year. Additional issues to those of the prior year were present.

Implementation of Problem Solving

Scanning. The nature of the problem initially identified was student truancy and its effect on the community and the school environment. The scanning phase was conducted by Lt. Lisa Womack, Project Advisor.

The problem was identified utilizing various sources of input. During the 1997-98 school year, it was recognized by the Arlington Independent School District and the Arlington Police Department that the level of truancy and student non-attendance was growing, particularly at one of the five (5) high school campuses – Sam Houston High School.

During the 1997-98 school year, the daily attendance rate at Sam Houston High School (SHHS) dropped to a district low of 89 percent. This was the first time that any school had dropped below at least a 90% average daily attendance rate. In addition, the number of complaint calls received by the police department regarding groups of juveniles “hanging out” around local businesses adjacent to SHHS began to increase. Local business owners also call the administrative staff of SHHS to complain about students out of school during normal school hours. Complaints included such problems as loitering, graffiti, criminal mischief, fights, and loud disturbances.

In May 1998, an informal survey was taken utilizing the School Resource Unit of the Arlington Police Department. The officers were asked to identify the number one problem facing the school environment and the School Resource Unit. In a vote of 10-0, the officers identified the issue of truancy as the number one issue to be addressed. In addition, discussion meetings were held with AISD school administrators, Sam Houston High School Principal Rickey Kempe and Jerry McCullough, Deputy Superintendent of Schools. McCullough indicated with urgency the need to address the growing problem of truancy and student non-attendance and agrees to participate in the project. Furthermore, Debra Carney, Project Research Analyst, conducted a review of current literature regarding truancy as it relates to crime and delinquency.

The initial level of diagnosis was based on preliminary analysis of basic data, anecdotal information from school administrators, officers, and interviews with local business owners/manages. The issue of student truancy/non-attendance as it relates to crime and public disorder was chosen as the focus of this SARA project. In order to adequately address the problem, the unit of analysis was limited to Sam Houston High School and the surrounding community.

Analysis. Several individuals were involved in various capacities during the analysis phase. Debra Carney, crime analyst with the Arlington Police Department and the primary project analyst, generated the report. Carrie Harter provided assistance in the preparation and collection of data from all focus groups. Charles Lester, Assistant Principal of Sam Houston High School, served as the school-based partner and liaison, and provided assistance in survey and focus group sample selections. Sgt. Lisa Womack served as a project director overseeing all activities conducted and reviewed the analysis report. Dr. Guisette Salazar evaluated the progress of the analysis phase, offering guidance on analysis and the methodology.

The data were collected using various data gathering methods: self-report methods such as surveys, focus groups, interview were used as well as traditional secondary data such as attendance and biographical data, and “police calls for help” information from the police department. The following populations were surveyed: student leaders, general student populations, and faculty. Focus groups were conducted with the following clusters: Student Leadership Class, truant and/or non-attending students, faculty, AISD security officers, and area residents. Interviews were conducted with two particular groups. In-person interviews were carried out with the immediate area business owners, representatives, and managers and area residents. Area residents were interviewed by telephone. Police calls for service data were generated by the police department, and attendance and biographical data generated by the Arlington independent School Districts.

The sources of the information for this study were: (1) student population consisting of student leaders, truant students, and the general student population; (2) faculty; (3) AISD security officers; (4) business owners, representatives and managers; (5) area residents. In summary, offenders, victims, and location-area were considered in this project. The scanning and analysis phase lasted throughout the 1998-1999 school year, about 10 months.

The only obstacles faced by the researcher in the data collection phase related to the location/environment subject, mainly the area businesses. The initial data approach planned for this population was to hold focus groups. However, no one attended. Accordingly, the solution was to have personal face-to-face interviews with the individual businesses.

Response. The research outcome clearly indicated a positive correlation between truancy-non-attendance and crime-public disorder. The research results led to the conclusion that for the response to effective it had to consist of a joint venture between local law enforcement, area business owners, residents, and the Arlington Independent School District and had to be on a continuous basis. Officially the response was initiated after the analysis phase and is on-going. The response phase comprises several elements:

- Equipment: new information system for the school: SASI (School Administrative Student Information) system.
- Security: security cameras were updated and number increased, and an electric utility vehicles to control the campus has been added making increasing the total to two.
- Crime prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)- limiting entry and exit of students during lunchtime.
- Schedule changes for students regarding lunch times where students are now assigned a specific lunch period that corresponds the their grade level.
- Increased teacher accountability in attendance tracking.
- Project PACT- Partners Against Chronic Truancy: a multi faceted problem-solving program designed to address the issues including all stakeholders in the program and response process. It entails personal contact between school administrators, uniformed police officers, and the parents of truant children. Two nights a week,

for a period of six weeks, a school representative and a uniformed police officer will attempt to contact the parents and the truant students to establish a communication pattern between all parties involved and deliver a written notification of non-attendance.

- Business education consisting of the following strategies: membership of all area businesses in PACT, distribution of informational documents about the program encouraging business owners to only allow students to enter their businesses during after- school hours; distribution of posters targeting truancy including information about notification of law enforcement of the presence of truant students.

This phase did not encounter any obstacles and the cooperation enjoyed by all parties and stakeholders involved in the process were remarkable.

Assessment. Debra Carney, Research Analyst with Arlington PD, conducted the assessment segment. In this stage the initial data gathering methods and sources were replicated to assess possible differences or changes in the records, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of the study participants that could be attributed to the response (s) implemented. The data were collected again through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and traditional secondary data such as attendance rates, biographical information, and police department records of calls for service. Several individuals and groups were involved in this phase and include: Carrie Harter, research assistant to Debra Carney; Charles Lester, assistant principal of Sam Houston High School; Sam Houston general student population; student leadership class; truant and/or non- attending students; Sam Houston faculty; AISD security officers; area residents; and area business owners.

The relationship between the Arlington Police Department, The Arlington Independent School District (AISD) and the Sam Houston High School officials is a strong and successful partnership involving mutual respect and collaboration. These entities have been working together since 1978 when the School Resource Unit was created. Since then they have collaborated on several undertakings addressing youth and student concerns in and around the school and throughout the city.

Impact of the Project

The assessment produced records that show reductions on most variables analyzed for the 1999-2000 school year. First, Sam Houston student attendance rates increased by 2.09 percent. Second, a decrease in total selected calls for service during school hours of 28 percent with a more than 50 percent reduction in certain call types such as theft and disturbance/loud noise transgressions. The decrease is equally impressive on calls for assault- 44 percent; criminal mischief- 48 percent; criminal trespass- 44 percent; and motor vehicle theft- 46 percent.

There was an increase in calls reporting disturbances and suspicious persons. This occurred because of the increased awareness of the problem and requests by the police department and school officials for the neighbors and area businesses to report student activities. The increase in callers reporting these incidents shows that the area is more receptive to enlisting police help and reporting students.

The interviews conducted with the area business owners and managers detail an increased level of satisfaction with the changes and decreased level of fear of victimization from truant students. The respondents also reported a 56 percent decrease in offenses committed against them or their property.

Overall, the follow-up interviews and surveys show an increased satisfaction with the implemented methods and results so far on campus and in neighboring areas from the Sam Houston High School faculty, officials, general student population, school security officers and resident businesses.

Overall Recommendations and Conclusions

The following recommendations were made based on the results obtained through the assessment and evaluation of the School Based Partnership Project:

- Extend the major components of the PACT throughout the school district for the 2000-2001 school year;
- Expand the program city-wide by educating other business about the problem.

A final comment regarding the school-based problem is that in order for any approach to be effective, it has to be a comprehensive and long-term response. Comprehensive in that it includes all students, school faculty and officials, parents, area businesses and residents, and the police department. Long term because this is not a problem that can be dealt with by introducing a response once during one school year and expect the impact to continue school year after school year. The problem really is a community problem not only a school issue.