

**Collecting Data in Schools:  
Using Surveys and Incident Reports in Bellingham**

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## **Collecting Data in Schools: Using Surveys and Incident Reports in Bellingham**

### **Introduction**

This report examines the School-Based Partnership (SBP) project in Bellingham, Washington. Unlike other case studies where we describe the implementation of the problem solving model, in this report we focus on two facets of the project: 1) the partnership that exists between the Bellingham Police Department and the two high schools, and 2) the use of surveys and incidents reports during the analysis phase of the problem-solving process. By describing these two areas in detail, we hope to provide readers with an understanding of the complexity and usefulness of the analysis phase.

### **Background**

The City of Bellingham is located in the northwest corner of the state of Washington, between Puget Sound (to the west) and Mount Baker (to the east). Bellingham is about 90 miles north of Seattle and 45 miles south of Vancouver, British Columbia. The city is comprised of approximately 67,200 residents. Of these residents approximately 91% are white, 1.5% are black, 2.5% are American Indian, and 5% are Asian. Over the last ten years Bellingham has experienced an increase in Asians, Russians, and Ukrainians immigrating to the city. The city's economic activity centers on educational, health, and social services, retail trade, and manufacturing. The average median household income is \$32,530, however, 20.6% of individuals residing in the city live below the poverty level and 6.8% are unemployed. A relatively high proportion of its residents are highly educated -- approximately 22% of residents have a college degree and 11% have a graduate degree (United States Census Bureau, 2001).

Compared to many cities across the United States, Bellingham does not experience a substantial amount of crime. For example, in 2001 there were two homicides, 51 robberies, 51 felonious assaults, 613 burglaries, 582 larcenies, and 203 auto thefts reported to the police (<http://www.cob.org/police/index.htm>). Similarly, the city's gang problem is relatively minor. In 1998, the police department reported to the National Youth Gang Center that they had documented 12 gangs and 150 gang members. They also indicated that the city had not experienced any gang homicides in 1998. However, local police officials note that a substantial amount of drug trafficking takes place in and around the city, in large part as a consequence of its geographic proximity between Vancouver and Seattle.

### **Bellingham Police Department**

#### **Background**

The Bellingham Police Department employs 176 people, of which 107 are sworn officers and 69 are civilians. The police administration includes Chief Randy Carroll, two Deputy Chiefs, six Lieutenants, and 13 sergeants. The department has two bureaus: operations and services. The Operations Bureau includes both a patrol and investigations division. In 2000, patrol officers were dispatched to 48,207 calls for service. Patrol officers are also responsible for handling most investigations involving misdemeanors. The investigations division is divided into two units -- a major crimes unit, which focuses on homicides, felony assaults, burglary, and other felonies, and a family crimes unit, which focuses on domestic violence, sex crimes, child and

elder abuse and missing persons. The Services Bureau provides educational resources to the community, schools, and local businesses. The bureau includes the Proactive Services Unit, which is staffed with school resource officers, crime prevention specialists, and community organization officers.

Chief Carroll, a 25-year veteran of the department, became chief in 2000, during the implementation of the school-based grant and the COPS in Schools program.

## **Community Policing in Bellingham**

In 1988, the police department began implementing community policing. Prior to this time police officials claimed that the department was “extremely isolated, militaristic and enforcement oriented.” As part of the agency’s commitment toward community policing all sworn officers were trained on the SARA model for problem solving. Two lieutenants in BPD are nationally recognized problem-oriented policing (POP) trainers for the state and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). These lieutenants provide technical assistance to agencies across the country on POP as well as training their own officers.

Officers indicated that the majority of the department’s problem solving efforts are conducted by the officers in the Bicycle Education and Enforcement Team (BEET). This unit proactively patrols the business district and the city parks, and responds to identified crime patterns. The officers work foot beats or use bicycles to increase contact with the community. BEET most typically responds to those problems identified by the local business association and those identified by crime analysts. The team addresses problems of homelessness, driving under the influence, and underage drinking. To facilitate the coordination of responses the team is assigned a Mobile Neighborhood Precinct, a recreational vehicle (RV) also known as the “Bacon Wagon.” The RV allows the team to better facilitate communication with other officers and allows them to book-and-release arrestees in the field. When the team is not working on a specialized project or conducting directed patrol, the officers use the RV as a tool to meet with kids, local neighborhood associations, and the general public.

The police department created the Proactive Services Unit to strengthen the ties between the community and the police department and to encourage community involvement in the prevention of crime. Lt. Mark Gill oversees the Proactive Services Unit, with Sgt. Carr Lanham serving as the supervisor for 11 officers. The unit provides educational opportunities through partnerships with neighborhood and business organizations, the school district, and the community in general. For example, in the early 1990s the agency established a community outreach program. The program assigns every “recognized neighborhood” in the city a group of officers that they can call upon for more personalized service. Each neighborhood group is comprised of a sergeant, detective, traffic officer, and a patrol officer. Recently, the department expanded the program to include officers to serve as points of contact to various ethnic and interest groups. Officers, for example, volunteer to serve as liaisons between the police department and the Hispanic, gay/lesbian, and Russian/Ukrainian communities. The department also established a number of other more formalized community outreach programs. Each of Bellingham’s 18 neighborhood associations conducts a monthly Captains Meeting where police officials and neighborhood leaders discuss various issues facing their neighborhood and develop responses to identified problems. Additionally, the Chief works with a number of community

interaction committees (business group, minority group, student group) to discuss problems facing the entire community.

In 1992, the Proactive Services Unit established the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program to work more closely with property owners in the local community. The program involves a three-phase process whereby property owners are trained and certified on matters pertaining to reducing crime on their properties. It also requires property owners to work with their tenants, in the form of tenant meetings, to distribute materials provided by the police department. Additionally, the police department has sought to increase its connectedness with the community by establishing a senior volunteers program, a police explorers program, and a citizen's academy. The department currently works with 20 senior citizens who are responsible for performing such duties as home security checks, handicap parking enforcement, and identifying abandoned vehicles. Similarly, the department created a police explorer's post, which allows high school students the opportunity to learn about the policing profession while at the same time serve as a volunteer within the agency. Explorers are expected to assist with community events and assist officers with their work.

The citizen academy is a 13-week program that exposes community members to the operations of the police department. Officers from various units within the department explain to the class their job and how it is performed. Graduates from the academy are eligible for a 4-hour ride along with a patrol officer.

## **The Bellingham School District**

### **Background**

The Bellingham School District is the largest of seven school districts in Whatcom County, Washington. The district encompasses about 100 square miles and primarily serves the residents of the city of Bellingham. Thirteen elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and one alternative school provide education to students. The district is staffed with about 650 teachers, 40 administrators, and 550 instructional assistants and support staff. About 85% of the teachers in the district have over five years of college or hold a master's degree. The school district, on average, spends \$6,488 per student and the average class size is 25.2 students per teacher (<http://www.bham.wednet.edu>).

The school district currently serves approximately 10,200 students. In terms of student ethnicity, 83.9% of students are Caucasian, 6% are Hispanic, 5.5% are Asian, 2.6% are American Indian, and 2% are African American. Almost 4% of students are enrolled in the English as a second language program, of which the majority of these students speak Spanish or Russian/Ukrainian as their primary language. About 2.8% of the district's students drop-out and almost 85% graduate from high school. In terms of standardized tests, Bellingham's students score substantially higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) when compared to national and state averages.

In May 2000, the Bellingham School District was awarded a \$4.49 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The district was only one of eight districts in the state to receive the grant as part of the foundation's "commitment to recognize and encourage high achievement models and develop strong leadership in education" (Bellingham Public Schools, 2000: 1). The

focus of the grant is on developing a strategic plan that helps raise student achievement through regular student assessments, active student learning, technology, and literacy. Funding received from the foundation is distributed to all of the schools throughout the district. High school officials believed that the grant will afford each school an opportunity to personalize educational experiences for their students and will increase the quality of life within the schools.

### **Squalicum and Sehome High Schools**

Squalicum and Sehome High School were the two schools targeted for intervention as part of the 1999 School-Based Partnership grant. These schools housed all high school students for two school terms (1998-2000) because Bellingham High School, the third senior high school in Bellingham, was closed for renovation.<sup>1</sup>

The two schools are substantially different from one another in terms of organizational philosophy, geographic location, and environmental design. Squalicum High School opened in the fall of 1998. It is equipped with modern computers, televisions in every room, and a technologically elaborate television studio that is used to produce a daily news program for the students. Squalicum High School is located in the middle of an affluent residential neighborhood. Squalicum was constructed to conform to a “house concept,” where students are permanently assigned to a specific house for the entire time that they attend the school. Each of the three “houses” is connected to one another through a central corridor, which includes a lunchroom, theater, and administrative offices. Each house is assigned a counselor and a staff to work with students and to facilitate administrative duties such as keeping attendance records. The house concept is designed to foster a small school atmosphere that personalizes the educational experience.

Sehome High School was built in 1966. The school’s facilities are dated when compared to Squalicum, however, the school does have a number of new computers and the building has been well maintained. The school is located next to Western Washington University, and is close to student housing and a number of stores and restaurants. Sehome High School is comprised of several one-story buildings built in the tradition of many California style high school campuses. While Squalicum is a closed campus, with only seniors being allowed to leave school over the lunch hour, Sehome has an open campus, which allows all students to leave campus during their breaks and at lunch. Many students walk to nearby fast-food restaurants or the large Haggan’s store for lunch.

However, while there are geographic and structural differences between the two schools, both schools are remarkably similar in terms of size, staffing, and funding. As seen in Exhibit 1, both schools have roughly 1,100 enrolled students, who are primarily Caucasian in ethnic background. The average class size at both schools is 27 students for every one teacher. In terms of staffing both schools have roughly 50 classroom teachers, five special education teachers, one library specialist, 3.5 guidance counselors, three administrators, 1.5 certified support staff, and 26 classified support staff. Squalicum High School has approximately \$335,000 in discretionary funds available and Sehome High School has about \$400,000.

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<sup>1</sup> During our visit in October 2002, Bellingham HS had been open for over a year.

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**Exhibit 1. Squalicum and Sehome High School Characteristics, 2000-2001 school year**

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	<b>Squalicum</b>	<b>Sehome</b>
<b>Student Enrollment</b>	1142	1095
<b>Student Ethnicity</b>		
African American	2%	1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2%	1%
Asian	7%	6%
Caucasian	85%	88%
Hispanic	5%	3%
<b>Average Class Size</b>	27	27
<b>Staffing</b>		
Classroom Teachers	48.4	51.0
Special Education Teachers	5.0	5.0
Library Media Specialists	1.0	1.0
Guidance Counselors	3.5	3.5
Administrators	3.0	3.0
Certified Support Staff (e.g., nurses, psychologists, speech pathologists)	1.5	1.6
Classified Support Staff	26.0	25.6
<b>School Discretionary Funds Budget</b>	\$334,578	\$401,636

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From: <http://www.bham.wednet.edu>

Exhibit 2 shows that the two schools are also very similar in terms student performance measures. Squalicum's drop-out rate is 1.9% and its graduation rate is 88.4% compared to Sehome's drop-out rate of 1.3% and its graduation rate of 85.4%. In terms of Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores both schools are alike with regard to both their verbal (541 versus 561), and math (565 versus 567) scores.

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**Exhibit 2: Squalicum and Sehome High School Student Performance, 2000-2001 school year**

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	<b>Squalicum</b>	<b>Sehome</b>
<b>Drop-Out Rate</b>	1.9%	1.3%
<b>Graduation Rate</b>	88.4%	85.4%
<b>SAT Scores</b>		
Verbal	541	561
Math	565	567
Total	1106	1128

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From: <http://www.bham.wednet.edu>

Both schools are also similar in that there is little criminal activity that takes place on their campuses. For example, at Squalicum High School the SRO explained that there are very few fights at the school—typically fewer than five per year. She also reported that there is little to no gang activity at the school. She indicated that the biggest problem in the school is harassment, with English as a Second Language students and openly gay students being the most likely to be harassed. In 1997, the school had 45 assault-related suspensions and expulsions. In 1996-97 the police responded to incidents at the school 156 times and in 1997-98 151 times.

At Sehome High School the school resource officer stated that there are few crime-related problems within the school. She indicated that a few marijuana and assault arrests are made each year, and that problems with vandalism have been increasing. In 1997, the school had 58 assault-related suspensions or expulsions. In 1996-97 the police responded to incidents at the school 198 times and in 1997-98 183 times.

## **Partnerships and Interrelationships**

To implement community policing and problem solving, partnerships between the police and the community are essential. During our interviews, we found that one of the strengths of the school-based project was the established relationship between the police and the school district. This section describes the partnerships and interrelationships as they apply to the police, the school district, and the high schools.

### **Partnerships at the Top**

One of Chief Carroll's priorities is to cultivate and maintain a strong relationship between the police department and the school district. For the past two years the Chief and the school administration have set a "cooperative agenda" for the two organizations. The Chief talks regularly with the superintendent and sits on the district's hiring committees as they select new school administrators. A representative from the school district sits on the police department's hiring committee for new police officers. The schools also help to decide which officers will work in the schools.

### **School-Based Projects**

The police department has a number of formal organizational arrangements with the school district. All of those interviewed agreed that the department's closest relationship is with the local school district. The relationship between the police and schools started in 1988 with the implementation of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program. Reports from both police and school officials indicated that there was slight resistance on the part of the schools to having a police officer on campus, however, the resistance quickly dissipated after both organizations became more familiar with one another. Currently, nine officers are assigned as school resource officers, of which two are assigned to work with the districts 15 elementary schools, and seven are assigned to work with the four middle schools and three high schools. The officers working in the elementary schools primarily focus on teaching the DARE curriculum. The school resource officers assigned to the junior and senior high schools are responsible for school safety and teach courses related to the constitution and the law. Interviews with the officers assigned to the district's three high schools indicated that the officers believe that their assignment to their school has resulted in increased: 1) student acceptance of

the police; 2) feelings of disciplinary support by teachers, 3) connectedness between the police and the schools, and 4) feelings of safety. It is important to point out that the assignment of the nine officers to the local school district represents a substantial commitment by the police department, in that almost 9% of the department's sworn officers are allocated to the city's schools.

BPD has also been involved in two school-based partnership projects over the past four years. Funding for the school-based partnership projects was obtained from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), as part of the School-Based Partnership grant program. The program was established to encourage police agencies to collaborate with local schools to address crime and disorder problems in and around schools. The school-based partnership program is based on the problem-solving model SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment). The police department was awarded one grant in 1998 and another in 1999. Both grants were directed by Bill Attebery, a former administrator with the school district, who served as a liaison between the police department and the district. Sergeant Carr Lanham of BPD, supervisor for the Proactive Services Unit (including the school resources officers), directed the project for the police department. The 1998 grant involved an analysis and response to a bullying problem identified within the elementary schools. The 1999 grant involved an analysis of potential assaults and a bullying problem within two of the school districts senior high schools.

### **Partnerships in the High Schools**

Sgt. Carr Lanham and the three high school SROs have established strong relationships with each of the Bellingham high schools. Each officer brings his or her own style and personality to the schools. Officer Jeff Hinds, the SRO at Bellingham High, works in plainclothes, teaches law enforcement-related classes, and serves as an assistant coach for the undefeated football team. In his second year at Bellingham High, Officer Hinds is familiar with the faculty and students at the school.

The officers assigned to the target schools, Squalicom and Sehome, are Officer Claudia Murphy and Officer Darla Wagner, respectively. Both officers are in their third and final years as SROs.

A SWAT officer and 11-year veteran, Officer Murphy is atop the promotion list and in all probability will become a sergeant prior to the end of the school year. At Squalicom, she is well acquainted with the curriculum and philosophy of the school. During our tour of the physical space, she pointed out the three houses that characterize the way in which the school operates. She explained that students in all grades are assigned to a house and will stay with the same house until they graduate. Ninth graders are mentored by upper classmen and an 'esprit de corps' is encouraged by the school administration for each house. In addition, Officer Murphy explained the new 'advisory system' called BOLT – Becoming one loyal team. Sixty teams of 15-20 students meet with a faculty member or administrator three times each week for 30 minutes. The Bolts are a mechanism that "personalizes the school or building," and encourages academic achievement. Teams get to know one another and the adult and are encouraged to communicate, listen, and work toward common goals. According to Principal Elmendorf, the purpose of the Bolt is to "make the school smaller" and less intimidating to new and current students. Officer Murphy, the security specialist and one other person are the only

administrators who did not lead a team. Nonetheless, Officer Murphy participates in some of the Bolts and can fill in for teachers or administrators if necessary.

Officer Murphy indicated that she works closely with Principal Becky Elmendorf on safety and security issues and in defining her role as an officer in the school. Unlike Officer Hines who wears plainclothes as he works in Bellingham High, Officers Murphy and Wagner wear their uniforms four days per week (Fridays are 'casual' days and they wear civilian clothes.) Officer Murphy indicated that she discussed the issue of wearing uniforms with Officer Wagner and the principal and decided to wear the uniform to provide visibility and 'presence.'

Officer Wagner is in her fifth year as a patrol officer and works closely with the Sehome assistant principals to insure a safe and secure environment. The physical design of the school plays a significant role in safety issues. Unlike Squalicum High and Bellingham High, Sehome has multiple buildings, pathways, and entrances and exits. The school is similar to a college campus because of its "California-style" lay out. This makes the campus difficult to secure if any major problems arose. For example, a "lock down" of the school would take some time, because there are a number of buildings with many entrances and exits. Officer Wagner finds it time-consuming to patrol the area completely and maintaining visibility of students on a continual basis is difficult. Nonetheless, she has developed a rapport with the administrators and feels comfortable with most of the students at Sehome.

Lastly, Sgt. Carr Lanham, the SRO supervisor is well-known at all of the high schools. As we toured the three schools, it was clear that students, teachers, and administrators knew him and were anxious to say hello or discuss the upcoming football game or the previous soccer match. His 14-year old daughter attends Bellingham High and his wife works there as well.

Overall, it appears that the presence and involvement of officers in the high schools have increased their credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the students, teachers, and administrators. The principal at Squalicum and the assistant principals at Sehome recognized the value of the officers in terms of security but also as a resource for information and advice. The officers themselves see the schools as "theirs" – in our conversations with them they all used language of "my school" or "my students" as they discussed their activities and roles in the schools.

### **Scanning**

In 1997 and 1998, officials in the police department began to recognize a trend of increasing number of calls for service and weapons-related incidents at the two local high schools. At the same time, school officials reported that suspensions and expulsions for assault were increasing and members of the community were complaining that problems related to cultural insensitivity and racial tensions were on the rise. In response the police department and school district considered a number of traditional responses, with most of them focusing on increasing the severity of school disciplinary sanctions and increasing the role of the police in the schools. However, because of the ambiguity of the school problems it was believed that a more deliberate and focused response would be more effective. As a result, the Bellingham Police Department applied for, and subsequently received, funding from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) to further examine the scope and nature of school problems at both

Squalicum and Sehome High Schools. In particular, the COPS Office funding was used to examine six questions:

- 1) What disciplinary events were occurring in the high schools and with what frequency?
- 2) When were these events occurring?
- 3) Where were these events occurring?
- 4) What pattern, if any, existed among perpetrators?
- 5) What pattern, if any, existed among victims?
- 6) What conditions, if any, in the school environment contributed to these events?

Prior to moving forward with the analysis phase of the project a local evaluator (Wendy Rowe, Ph.D. from Cambie Group) was selected. The local evaluator had a substantial amount of prior evaluation experience, having been involved in a number of federally funded projects through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Additionally, she had served as a faculty member at John Jay College in New York City, New York for one year and served as the police department's local evaluator for the 1998 school-based partnership grant.

### **Analysis**

The analysis phase of the project began in December 1999. At that time, project staff agreed that the analysis phase of the project would be directed toward the two high schools in the city. They also agreed that they would use three methodological strategies for examining the scope and nature of the problems at the two schools. First, incident data would be collected at each school to document: 1) the type of incident, 2) date, time, and location of the incident, 3) characteristics of the perpetrators and the victims, 4) prior history of related incidents, 5) injuries, and 6) police involvement. These data were collected between October 2000 and June 2001. A standardized form was created to document each incident and instructional assistants were trained to collect the data. After the data were collected the information was forwarded to the crime analysis unit for data entry.

Second, students at each of the two schools would be surveyed on their perceptions related to crime and safety. A student safety advisory group was created at each school to assist the local evaluator with the construction of the survey instrument. A one-hour meeting was held at both high schools with nine students attending at Sehome High and eight students attending at Squalicum High. Observations of the meetings indicated that the students believed that the survey should elicit information from all students, should be confidential, and should ask questions in a way that students would feel comfortable answering the questions (i.e., multiple choice, close-ended questions). The student safety advisory groups also thought that they should introduce the survey to help explain the nature of the project. With regard to the content of the instrument the student groups suggested that the survey ask questions pertaining to the students' perceptions of physical and psychological safety, intimidation, sexual harassment, theft, weapons, how the students deal with conflict, location of problems, and desire for security cameras.

Initial survey instrument construction was completed during the summer of 2000 and the survey was shared with school administrators and the police department for feedback. Suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the survey instrument, which was administered to the students at both high schools in October 2000. At Sehome High School the survey was

administered to 898 students (out of 1,273) and at Squalicum High School the survey was administered to 940 students (out of 1,227). As such, the response rate for the survey at both schools was above 70%.

Third, project staff agreed that in-depth interviews should be administered to a small number of students that participated in the student survey. The purpose of the interviews would be to further explore problems identified from the survey of the student population. These interviews were conducted in the spring of 2001 by the local evaluator. By the end of the project the evaluator, Dr. Rowe, had interviewed 62 randomly selected students—30 from Sehome High School and 32 at Squalicum High School.<sup>2</sup>

### **Crime Analysis Results: Incidents at Sehome**

During the 2000-01 school year, 210 incidents were reported to school administrators at Sehome High. About 46% of the incidents (n=97) involved defying school authority and disruptive behavior. There were 19 reported harassments, 18 instances of illegal substances and 29 ‘other’ problems (these included forged notes, inappropriate clothing, and misrepresentation of self). Of the 210 incidents, 11 resulted in an arrest by the police. Most of the incidents occurred during school hours, especially during class time (117), lunch (31), and between classes (24). Before and after school hours accounted for 27 incidents.

*Participants.* A total of 271 students and 57 faculty were involved in the 210 incidents. Among the students, 244 (90%) were classified as offenders and 27 (10%) as victims. Exhibit 3 shows the characteristics of the students who were involved in the incidents. A majority of offenders (74%) and victims (59%) were males, many more 9<sup>th</sup> graders were involved than other grade levels, and a higher proportion of offenders and victims were special education students.

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<sup>2</sup> Data reported in the following sections are taken from “Community Oriented Policing High School Conflict Study, School Year 2000-2001,” Bellingham Police Department and Bellingham School District, 2002. The project team

**Exhibit 3. Students Involved in Sehome High School Incidents,  
Comparing Offenders and Victims**  
*From the High School Conflict Study, 2002*

	<b>Offenders (n=244)</b>		<b>Victims (n=27)</b>		<b>All Students (n=271)</b>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	180	73.8%	16	59.3%	196	72.4%
Female	64	26.2%	11	40.7%	75	27.7%
<b>Grade Level</b>						
9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	86	35.2%	12	44.4%	98	36.2%
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	74	30.3%	8	29.6%	82	30.3%
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	56	23.0%	5	18.5%	61	22.5%
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	28	11.5%	2	7.4%	30	11.1%
<b>Average Age</b>	16.0 years		15.6 years		15.9 years	
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
White/Caucasian	228	93.4%	24	88.9%	252	93.0%
Minority Youth	16	6.6%	3	11.1%	19	7.0%
<b>Years in District</b>	Mean = 6.6 years		Mean = 7.3 years		Mean = 7.3 years	
<b>Prior Suspensions</b>	89	36.5%	8	29.6%	97	35.8%
<b>Prior Disciplinary Incidents</b>	138	56.6%	10	37.0%	148	54.6%
<b>IEP/ 504 Status</b>	75	30.7%	7	25.9%	82	30.3%

Exhibit 4 shows that 44 students were involved in more than one incident. These students accounted for 130 of the incidents. Ten students accounted for 52 incidents. From the High School Conflict Study, the authors indicate that “the multiple incident offenders have the most troubled profile—student who are not doing well at school, not engaged in school activities, have poor peer relations, have a history of prior disciplinary incidents and have had prior suspensions.”

Of particular importance to school administrators, 40 special needs students were involved in 75 incidents (36% of the incidents). In fact, four special needs students accounted for 24 incidents and were the individuals who had the highest number of re-offending – one student was involved in seven incidents and another was involved in eight.

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included the project director, members of the police department, the school district, the local evaluator, and data collectors at both high schools. We refer to the document as the *High School Conflict Study, 2002*.

#### **Exhibit 4. Number of Offenders by Number of Incidents at Sehome High School**

*From the High School Conflict Study, 2002.*

	<b>Student Offenders</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1 incident	114	72.2%
2 incidents	24	15.2%
3 incidents	10	6.3%
4 incidents	3	1.9%
5 incidents	5	3.2%
6 incidents	0	
7 incidents	1	.6%
8 incidents	1	.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Twenty-nine teachers and administrators were victimized by students. Some teachers were victimized more than once, as they were involved in 57 incidents. One faculty member reported being victimized in nine incidents.

#### **Student survey and interviews at Sehome**

From the student survey, an overwhelming majority of students (79%) said that they mostly or always felt safe at school. Although they felt safe at school, students reported that they did not feel safe riding the school bus (33%) or going to the parking lot at night (54%). In contrast to the officially reported incidents, 33% of students at Sehome reported that it is common for physical fights to occur at school. They also said that they had been pushed or shoved around by other kids (46%). Over 12% said they had a student threaten to hurt them with a knife or other weapon at some time in the past while at a school-sponsored event.

From interviews with students, it appears that harassment, bullying, and the presence of strong social cliques are interconnected. That is, it seems that the “popular students” tend to bully the less popular ones or those who are “different” (i.e., gay/lesbian students, minorities, and special needs students).

Students indicated that they primarily take care of themselves rather than look to school administrators or parents to address safety issues at school. This explains their unwillingness to report incidents officially. Girls said they avoided people who threaten or hassle them and avoided conflicts or fights. While boys also said they try to avoid people who threaten them, they were more inclined to “stand up for themselves” and fight if necessary. Nineteen percent of boys indicated that they carry a weapon to protect themselves, though they did not indicate the type of weapon.

Students also reported that they have some difficulty with the rules and policies at the school, including getting into arguments with teachers or administrators. About 27% of students said they get into conflicts with teachers; about 41% argue with teachers about rules and policies and about 24% said they have trouble solving problems they have with teachers/administrators.

About 40% of students said they will talk to a parent about things happening at school but less than a third said they would talk to an administrator or a teacher at school. A number of students indicated they were distrustful of the administration and often had poor relationships with certain teachers. Some teachers/administrators were seen as individuals who target certain students and do things to create or exacerbate conflicts. The campus police officer was not seen as “adding much value” since students said she kept a low presence and the students could easily avoid her. (This is also indicative of the layout of the campus – students may not see Officer Wagner because they do not walk into certain buildings or in specific areas.)

The High School Conflict Study also reported that the general perception seemed to be that while the school was not an entirely safe place, the students had learned to cope with it and to deal with the situations of harassment or threats from within. Taking care of themselves and not going to administration to solve problems (sometimes called “narking”) was seen as the norm.

### **Squalicum High School**

Squalicum High School reported 274 incidents during the 2000-01 school year. Almost half of these incidents (48%) involved disciplinary situations of students defying school authorities or being disruptive. Nine percent of incidents involved drugs and 5% involved fighting or assaults. Most incidents (62%) occurred or were reported during class time at the school. Police made an arrest in 20 incidents.

The High School Conflict Study reported that the 274 incidents involved 409 participants (355 students and 53 faculty). Student participants were likely to be white males in the lower grades. Twenty-two (22) percent of the participants in these incidents were minority students, which is higher than their overall representation in the student population (14%).

Of the 355 student participants, 318 were classified as offenders and 37 as victims. There were 171 individual students (unduplicated count) involved in these 274 incidents. Of these, 76 were multiple incident offenders and 95 were involved in a single incident. Thus, 44% of the student offenders were involved in 179 incidents (representing 65% of all incidents) occurring at Squalicum High.

More than a quarter of all offenders were special needs students or IEP. These 47 special needs students (representing 35% of the total special needs population at Squalicum) were involved in 118 incidents (43% of all incidents). Over a third of these students were involved in multiple incidents, mostly situations of defiance of school authorities and disruptive behavior (49% of all incidents).

**Exhibit 5. Profile of Students Involved in Squalicum High School Incidents,  
Comparing Offenders and Victims**  
*From the High School Conflict Study, 2002*

	Offenders (n=318)		Victims (n=37)		All Students (n=355)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	240	75.4%	20	54.1%	260	73.3%
Female	78	24.5%	17	45.9%	95	26.7%
<b>Grade Level</b>						
9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	103	32.4%	14	37.8%	117	33.0%
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	95	29.9%	11	29.7%	106	29.9%
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	81	25.5%	8	21.6%	89	25.1%
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	39	12.3%	4	10.8%	43	12.1%
<b>Average Age</b>	15.9 years		15.6 years		15.8 years	
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
White/Caucasian	245	77.0%	33	89.2%	278	78.3%
Minority Youth	73	23.0%	4	10.8%	77	21.7%
<b>Years in District</b>	6.3 years		7.2 years		6.4 years	
<b>Prior Suspensions</b>	148	46.5%	8	21.6%	156	43.9%
<b>Prior Disciplinary Incidents</b>	266	83.6%	16	43.2%	282	79.4%
<b>IEP/ 504 Status</b>	118	37.1%	4	10.8%	122	34.4%

**Exhibit 6. Number of Offenders by Number of Incidents at Squalicum High School**  
*From the High School Conflict Study, 2002*

# of Incidents	Offenders	
	Number	Percent
1 incident	95	55.6%
2 incidents	35	20.5%
3 incidents	26	15.2%
4 incidents	6	3.5%
5 incidents	4	2.3%
6 incidents	4	2.3%
7 incidents	1	.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Student Survey and Interviews**

The High School Conflict Study reported that 77% of Squalicum High School students responded to the safety survey and 32 older students participated in an in-depth interview on various topics of safety. Most of the students (70%) said they mostly or always felt safe at school. At least a third or more of the students indicated they didn't feel safe riding the school bus, or going out to the parking lot (especially at night). Girls were more likely to report concern for their safety than the boys.

Students reported there were many social cliques at the school and as a result, “different” or “inferior” students were harassed by certain individuals or groups. Over 37% of students said they had experienced harassment (being shoved or pushed around by other students) at some time while at school. Over 12% of students say they have had a student threaten to hurt them with a knife or other weapon at some time in the past while at school.

A small number of students said they were currently experiencing harassment (pushed or shoved, 8%) or sexual harassment (9%). Four percent of students said they had recently had another student threaten to hurt them with a knife or other weapon.

To make themselves safe at school, students indicated that they look to their friends, parents or a friendly teacher/counselor to help them address an issue of safety at school. Girls avoid the people who threaten or hassle them, group together with friends to maintain their safety, and verbally stand up for themselves when they have to. Most girls said they could avoid getting into conflicts or a fight. Boys said they also try to avoid the people who might be threatening or hassling them, verbally stand up for themselves but will fight or use aggression if they have to. Approximately 44% of students said they will talk to a parent about things happening at school but only a third said they would talk to administrators or teachers at school. Fewer students turned to administrators, saying they did not entirely trust how they would deal with things without “overreacting”. Parents were also seen as overreacting at times. Students said they could talk to counselors and some teachers about things that were happening at school.

The campus police officer was seen as adding much value. She appears to have a highly visible presence and many students said fighting and vandalism was reduced from previous years. The combined presence of the campus police officer and the security officer was seen as beneficial since they could cover more territory in the school and address different kinds of issue. The security officer was seen as more approachable, while the police officer was seen more as an enforcer.

The general perception seemed to be that while the school was not an entirely safe place, the students had learned to cope with it and to deal with the situations of harassment or threats from within. Taking care of themselves and making use of counselors/teachers was the norms. Going to administration to solve problems was seen as narking and something that should be avoided unless matters were extremely serious.

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Background Summary**

In this report we examined the School-Based Partnership (SBP) project in Bellingham, Washington. The project in Bellingham was based on the problem-solving model SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment). The project was directed by a former administrator with the school district who served as the liaison between the police department and school district. A Sergeant who supervised the police department’s school resource officers directed the project for the police department. The project involved the examination of assaults and bullying within two senior high schools.

Project staff collected several sources of data to examine the nature and scope of assaults and bullying within the schools. First, incident data were collected at each school to examine the: 1) nature of incidents, 2) date, time, and location of incidents, 3) characteristics of the offenders and victims, 4) prior history of incidents, 5) injuries, and 6) police involvement. Second, students at each of the schools were surveyed. A student advisory group was used to assist with the construction of the survey instrument. The final instrument asked questions pertaining to student perceptions of safety, intimidation, sexual harassment, theft, weapons, and how students respond to conflict. Third, over 30 students were interviewed to more fully understand the problems identified by the study survey.

### **Summary of Results**

According to the police, school administrators, and the local evaluator, the analysis of data provided clarity about specific issues at each high school. The study provided information on the extent and nature of incidents happening at each of the high schools, who was involved in these incidents and what issues of safety were of paramount concern to students.

Questions about gang and racial conflict were put at rest. There was no strong evidence at either school that gangs were creating safety problems for students or administration, nor that the conflicts between students were primarily racially motivated.

While there were differences between the two high schools in the cultural climate and the perceptions of the students about safety, there were also many similarities. These similarities included:

- Approximately half the incidents involved students defying school authorities or being disruptive.
- Most incidents were reported to occur during class time at school.
- Student offenders were likely to be white males in the lower grades.
- Offenders were likely to have lower GPAs, were unconnected to school activities, had poor relationships with peers.
- Special needs students (on 504 or IEPs) were implicated in about a third of the incidents.
- Approximately a quarter of the individual offenders were responsible for more than 50% of all incidents
- Students involved in multiple incidents throughout the year were different from the single incident offenders. They were more likely to be white males, on special needs status, victims in other incidents, had suspensions and disciplinary actions in previous years, were doing more poorly in school, and were not involved in school activities.
- A quarter of all the individual offenders (unduplicated count) were special need students. These individuals represented about a third of the population of special needs students in both schools, and were responsible for about 35-40% of all the disciplinary or criminal incidents. Most of these incidents were defiance of authority and being disruptive.
- A majority of the victims were teachers or administrators. Approximately 50% of the teachers or administrators at both schools reported most of the incidents. A few faculty members were involved in multiple incidents with many students.

For the stakeholders, the high proportion of special needs students who were involved in disciplinary incidents at both high schools warranted attention. The students appeared to be

doing poorly at school, typically had low academic grades, and had poor peer relationships with other students. In addition there appeared to be a small group of teachers/administrators who were involved in these difficulties with special needs students.

To remedy the problem of special needs students at Squalicum, some of the students were monitored more carefully and new teachers replaced the ones who were having difficulties with the students.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the present study of the Bellingham, Washington School-Based Partnership project three recommendations are suggested.

### **1. Continue the Momentum.**

Interviews with project staff, and other key stakeholders, indicated that the Bellingham Police Department is well integrated into the normal operations of the Bellingham School District. This was not only observed through the number of formal and informal organizational arrangements between the two organizations but also through the amount of resources that the police department expends on improving school safety. We would recommend that the police department continue to collaborate with the local school district and seek opportunities to build on momentum that is currently taking place.

### **2. Develop Responses and Perform Assessments.**

The analysis that was conducted for the 1998 and 1999 SBP grants was thorough and well thought out. A number of data sources were examined to triangulate the scope and nature of problems in each of the schools. We recommend that the police department work with each school, in concert with the local evaluator, to develop individualized responses to address the identified problems. This would provide the police department with an opportunity to further collaborate with the school district and build on the momentum that has already taken place between the two organizations. We would also recommend that after the responses have been implemented assess their effectiveness.

### **3. Student Involvement.**

In the analysis phase of the project students played a major role in identifying problems within each of the schools, assisted with the development of the survey instruments, and worked with the administration in collecting the data. We would recommend that the police and schools continue to work with students in identifying problems within the school and would also recommend that they work with the students in constructing responses to the identified problems. This approach has a number of benefits, especially in school settings, including obtaining buy in from key stakeholders, summoning student empowerment, and developing problem solving skills among the students.

## **References**

Bellingham Police Department and Bellingham School District (2002). "Community Oriented Policing High School Conflict Study, School Year 2000-2001," unpublished report.

Website sources of information:

<http://www.cob.org/police/index>

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