

**The School-Based Partnership Program in San Diego County
Results of Local-Level Evaluation**

**By
The San Diego County Sheriff's Department and
The La Mesa - Spring Valley Middle School**

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Background

Police Department

The San Diego Sheriff's Department is the chief law enforcement agency in the County of San Diego. The Department is comprised of approximately 4,000 employees, both sworn officers and professional support staff. The Department provides general law enforcement and jail functions for the population of the San Diego in a service area of approximately 4,200 square miles. In addition, the Department provides specialized regional services to the entire County, in both the incorporated cities as well as the unincorporated areas not serviced by a city law enforcement agency.

In January 1995 the Sheriff's Department introduced a new strategy to address the issue that many calls to the Department were repeated calls for help. Rather than treat each call as a fifteen-minute event and then proceed to the next incident, Sheriff William Kolender established the Sheriff Department's first Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS) teams. Community oriented policing is both a philosophy and an organizational strategy that encourages and supports the deputy and the community to work closely together in new ways to solve the problems of crime, fear of crime, physical and social disorder and neighborhood decay.

The Spring Valley COPPS office had its grand opening on March 17, 1996. In September, 1999 Corporal Jane Bailey-Sease was assigned to the COPPS office to serve as the school-based partnership liaison with La Mesa-Spring Valley School District. She is also assigned to work closely with the community residents in Spring Valley and the unincorporated areas of La Mesa and El Cajon.

Additionally, a Probation Officer from the San Diego County Department of Probation, Lynda Hoban, was also assigned to this project. She was assigned half time to this project and half time to the School District. In July 2000 Ms. Hoban left this assignment for another probation position and Sherry Marcue, Probation Officer, assumed Ms. Hoban's duties in the project and the District. When Ms. Marcue left for maternity leave in March she was replaced by Kevin Kellback, another Deputy Probation Officer.

The Spring Valley Middle School

The Spring Valley Middle School (SVMS) is located in Spring Valley, in the northern section of the community. The attendance area of SVMS is unique because the surrounding homes range from multi-million dollar homes to large apartment complexes for low-income families. The school facility, which is 45 years old, is positioned near a busy thoroughfare, with mini-malls and fast food restaurants. There are no large parks or recreation centers near the campus.

SVMS's student population of 1,307 includes students who speak 20 different languages and represent several different ethnic groups (55% Caucasian, 22% Hispanic, 15% African-American and 8% Other). The school is composed of 384 sixth graders, 432 seventh graders, 386 eighth graders, and 55 special education students. 505 students at SVMS qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch (40%). There are 60 certificated staff members and 38 classified staff members.

Prior to the implementation of the school-based partnership program SVMS's relationship with the police was a sporadic and somewhat impersonal. Administrators called the Sheriff's Department when they needed assistance with crime related incidents, but reports were not always filed for documentation. The deputy that answered the call for assistance was whoever was on patrol on that time. There were previously no relationship with a specific deputy and contact was mainly limited to crime incidents.

The major issues at SVMS have been student disputes primarily verbal in nature.

Implementing Problem Solving

The SARA problem-solving model has been used in the implementation of the school-based partnership program.

Scanning

The scanning phased of the project involved: 1) gathering and reviewing relevant school community statistics, such as SANDAG population summary and forecasts, Sheriff's Department crime analysis reports, log sheets and juvenile arrest reports, San Diego County Community Assessment Team Client Data Summary, Spring Valley Healthy Start Parent Surveys, SVMS Student Safety Survey (1998), School Crime Reports, Suspensions, SVMS demographics, and SVMS achievement test data; 2) developing and administering comprehensive questionnaires regarding school/community problems to SVMS students, staff, parents, and community members; and 3) observing students in locations on and off campus to determine the amount and type of problems along with the most frequent locations. The problem that the group decided on was student disputes, with an emphasis on bullying.

Analysis

The analysis process involved the joint cooperation between the partners: the school district (LMSV project leader), law enforcement (Sheriff's Deputy) and probation (Deputy Juvenile Probation Officer) with assistance from the Social Science Research Laboratory (SSRL) at San Diego State University. The data that were came from: 1) Questionnaires administered to the total student body of SVMS, the total SVMS staff (certified and classified), the parents of SVMS students (25% return rate) and a sample of 44 business community members within a half mile radius of the school; and 2) Victim/Offender/Location surveys completed by school, law enforcement, and probation staff members related to specific student dispute situations. The analysis phase of the project lasted approximately two months, during January and February 2000. There were no major problems or obstacles encountered during this phase.

Response

The response phase involved all of the major stakeholders: students, staff members, parents, community members, and our law enforcement partners. After a series of meetings and focus groups with the stakeholders over a three-month period (April-June 2000), during which the results of the analysis were shared, the consensus was that the project would focus on bullying awareness and prevention at SVMS.

The response was implemented by designing a comprehensive bullying awareness and prevention program at SVMS. We hired Stan Davis, a school counselor from Maine who is a

national expert in bullying prevention, during the third week of school in September 2000 to work with SVMS students, staff, and parents. Mr. Davis conducted presentations on bullying prevention for the entire student body in groups of 60 students, using magic and interactive theatre. He also provided a three-hour staff development for staff members focused on creating a school climate that discourages bullying. Additionally, parents were invited to an evening program on the bullying topic. In the months following Mr. Davis' work at SVMS, a committee of project staff, teachers, administrators, classified staff and students was formed to reinforce the anti-bullying message at SVMS. The committee instituted a system for student reporting of bullying incidents (called the "alligator box"), revised the discipline referral form to include a category for bullying, and has planned and implemented a bullying prevention activity for the student body each month. In addition, four large vinyl banners have been hung at the school to advertise the anti-bullying messages in the common areas.

In addition to the COPS grant, the resources used to implement the response phase were:

- 1) Sheriff's Deputy and Probation Officer's time as committee participants and their frequent presence on campus to interact with students (2-8 hours per week);
- 2) Funds from a California School Community Policing Project (SCPP) grant that was awarded to the District in 2000 which have been used to pay teachers for their time spent implementing bullying prevention activities and to purchase several two-way radios used for hallway and lunch area discipline monitoring;
- 3) Involvement of the District's Middle School Drug and Safety Coordinator in our anti-bullying activities; and
- 4) A juvenile diversion worker from the San Diego Youth and Community Services agency worked with groups of at-risk students implementing a Positive Choices curriculum.

The response phase was one school year, from September 2000 through June 2001. There were no major problems or obstacles encountered by the project during this phase.

Assessment

The assessment was conducted using a variety of different sources of data. The project's evaluator designed a pre/post-bullying census which was administered to SVMS staff members and students prior to the start of the program in early September 2000 and then again in June 2001, at the end of the school year. Project staff and school staff members were involved in administering the questionnaires.

Student focus groups were convened in October 2000 and again in June 2001 to discuss their perceptions of the bullying problem at SVMS. Teachers from the bullying prevention committee facilitated their grade level focus groups and recorder their responses.

Finally, archived data that documented the number of suspensions and logged discipline incidents was used to assess the project's impact. The vice principal was involved in tracking this information.

Partnership Information

Throughout the implementation of the school-based partnership project the relationship between the partners has been strong and cooperative. The major decisions have been dealt with by consensus of the partners, after equal participation in research and discussion. Each partner has contributed to the project based on individual skills and strengths. The three partners respect and support each other in all matters. Although few “formal” meetings were held between the partners, there was, at minimum, a weekly informal exchange of information and ideas related to the project. Attending training sessions and conferences together helped to strengthen the partnership bond, as well as the process of working together to achieve common goals. When Lynda Hoban, the first probation officer assigned to the project, left the project in July 2000 her replacement, Sherry Marcue, was trained by Lynda and quickly became a part of the partnership team. Likewise, Kevin Kellbach (Ms. Marcue’s replacement) was trained and became an effective part of the partnership team.

Impact of the Project

Effects on police, school and participants

A major effect of the school-based partnership program on the police, school and participants is the close and supportive relationship that has developed between the law enforcement partners and SVMS. Before the program started the presence of a police car on campus signified that there was some sort of trouble occurring. Now there is a patrol car parked in front of SVMS several times a week and although it still could mean that there is a crime-related problem on campus...it could also mean that the Deputy is spending the lunch hour interacting with students informally...or attending an after school meeting with teachers and administrators to deal with bullying prevention...or speaking with a specific student referred by the vice principle who simply needs to hear from law enforcement about potential consequences of behavior...or even teaching a class to students on drugs or a related topic. In other words, the Sheriff's Deputy has developed a personal relationship with the school and its students, based on trust, support, and cooperation.

The increased rapport with the law enforcement as a result of the project has had an impact on the number of calls for service to the Sheriff's Department from the school. During the 1999-2000 school year there were 56 calls for service from SVMS to the Sheriff's Department. The next year, during the COPS program implementation, that number increased to 83 calls for service, a 33.5% increase. This increase should be viewed positively as an indication of the trust and rapport between school and law enforcement. In years, past, prior to the school-based partnership program, the school dealt with most incidents itself and law enforcement was contacted only in extreme or severe incidents.

A similar type of relationship has been built with the deputy probation officer. Prior to the school-based partnership program the probation officer visited the school solely to follow up on individual students referred for truancy issues. Now the probation officer not only performs those duties, but also sits on the bullying prevention committee, assists the administrators with discipline matters, relates informally with the students and is present on campus at least eight hours per week, often more.

In regard to bullying, the major issue addressed by this project, the effect on the students at SVMS has been very positive. The sense of heightened awareness of what bullying is and how it can be stopped is apparent throughout the school from the four large banners that are permanently displayed in common areas to the talk between students that can be overheard frequently on campus. Students have begun to report bullying to adults through the use of the "Alligator Box", located in the library. There is a simple form to fill out with the student's concern. A staff member checks the box every two hours during the day and referrals are made to an appropriate source to deal with the problem, usually a counselor, administrator, peer mediator, or teacher. In the time period between January and June 2001, there were **39** bullying related reports made by students and followed up by staff members. A comparison of the results of the pre and post student and staff bullying census indicate the following:

- a. There is an increased level of awareness of bullying behavior on the part of both students and staff. (See questions #1, 2, 3, 5 on student census and question #2 on staff survey)

- b. There are an increased number of reported bullying incidents, which most likely is due to the heightened level of awareness. (See questions #1, 2 on student census, question #3 on staff survey)
- c. Regarding the efforts made through the COPS program to reduce/eliminate bullying behavior, 54% of students felt that the efforts were successful and 42% felt they were not successful. The large number of students who felt the efforts were unsuccessful may be attributed to the short time factor of the program's implementation (9 months). This time period was sufficient to raise the level of awareness, but perhaps not sufficient to reduce the actual bullying behaviors. 68% of the staff, on the other hand, felt the bullying prevention activities were effective and 28% felt that they were ineffective. In fact, 86% of the staff members felt that bullying behavior was reduced at SVMS due to activities such as bullying prevention assemblies, banners, alligator box reporting system, monthly awareness activities, and zero tolerance of bullying behavior.

In conjunction with results of the student surveys, the effect of the program on students can be measured via discussion held in student focus groups. Student focus groups, divided by grad level and comprised of randomly assigned students, were convened at the beginning of the school year in October and then again in May to discuss the bullying problem at SVMS. Discussion lead to the following observations and conclusions by students:

- a. The majority of students felt that bullying had decreased over the school year (with the exception of the sixth graders who felt bullying had increased since school began, possibly because they were more integrated in the school in May than they had been in September, only three weeks into a new school)
- b. 6th and 7th grade students felt that increasing the level of adult supervision in certain "remote" areas could decrease bullying. All students felt that bullying occurred when adults were not present.
- c. Students felt that project bullying prevention activities were good and should be repeated more frequently (i.e., more assemblies, skits, etc.) 8th graders felt bullying prevention activities should be integrated into other areas of the curriculum (i.e., writing prompts).
- d. 7th grade students felt that more lunchtime activities would curb bullying behaviors by giving students something positive on which to focus their attention.
- e. 6th graders felt that the "alligator box" was an excellent idea, but inconveniently located for 6th graders. Also, they felt that they would like to be introduced to 7th and 8th grade teachers so they would feel more comfortable approaching them with problems.

The number of suspensions and referrals is another measure of the effect of the school-based partnership project. At SVMS there was a marked decrease in suspension incidents, from 474 during 1999/2000 to 211 during 2000/2001, a 55% decrease. During the same period the logged discipline incidents increased from 1,410 during 1999/2000 to 1,809 during 2000/2001 (a 28% increase). One interpretation of these seemingly contradictory statistics is that although the

amount of logged discipline incidents increased, this was due to an increased awareness by administration and staff of the importance of documenting student behavior.¹ Therefore, it is possible that the increase in logged discipline incidents may be a function of reporting methods by the new administrator and other staff members.

Overall Recommendations and Conclusions

The COPS School-Based Partnership program has had a positive impact at SVMS and in the community. The recommendations based on the evaluation, are:

- 1) Work to continue the close and supportive relationship with the Sheriff's Deputy from the Spring Valley Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving Office. Continue to request assistance for crime and violence related matters and, at the same time, encourage the Deputy's involvement on campus for prevention and community relations activities.
- 2) Work to continue the close and supportive relationship with the Deputy Probation Officer from the San Diego County Department of Probation. Continue to utilize his expertise in truancy matters and encourage his extended involvement on campus for prevention and support.
- 3) Continue to implement the bullying prevention program, by training the incoming 6th graders each fall and continuing to work on school-wide awareness, reporting, and discipline related to bullying behavior. Work on developing a student training program for bullying prevention that will be used to train incoming groups of 6th graders yearly. Include expectations related to bullying in the student handbook and review them at the scheduled periodic all-school discipline assemblies.
- 4) Adopt a zero tolerance approach to bullying behavior on campus by giving offenders clear, swift and appropriate consequences.

In conclusion, the school-based bullying problem at SVMS is one that has been affected by the responses implemented during this project. The awareness level has increased over the first year of implementation as a result of student training, school-wide activities, and interventions by adults. To decrease the actual incidence of bullying behavior, recommendations #2 and #3 will be necessary to implement.

¹ These statistics must also be viewed in the context of the arrival of a new vice principal during the 2000/2001 school year.