2000 Youth Violence Study

A Report to the Citizens of Marion County - Spring 2000

SCOPE OF STUDY

Concern about youth violence in our community has become the focus of community leaders in both the public and private sectors. Violence in our youth is a troubling sign that many of our youth are not developing appropriately. The ability of youth to live and learn in a safe environment has become apriority of both parents and the community. Because of the ever changing structure of families and the roles that educators are asked to play in the lives of their students, it is important to look at the issue of youth violence on a comprehensive level.

This study was designed to:

1. Document the characteristics and extent of youth violence in Marion County and the Marion County Public Schools.
2. Research the underlying causes of violence in our schools and the community.
3. Analyze current school and community responses to youth violence.
4. Research national, state, and community programs, which have been successful in the prevention and reduction of youth violence.
5. Establish recommendations for reducing the incidence of youth violence.
6. Present the recommendations to the community for implementation.

HIGHLIGHTS

MAJOR PROBLEMS

1. The juvenile justice system and treatment facilities are serving first time offenders, which would be better served by effective prevention or intervention programs.
2. Members of society have become too tolerant of violence, giving youth mixed messages about its acceptability, including the messages in the movies and media.
3. Lack of parental involvement in student, school and domestic activities, may contribute to school violence.
4. Poor academic performance, which leads to poor self-esteem, is a major predictor of delinquency in our schools.
5. There is a strong correlation between child and domestic abuse and juvenile violence in our community.
6. Societal standards have disintegrated creating a moral crisis and generally desensitizing our youth toward violence.

RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

1. Using Howard Middle School as a model, expand after school prevention and intervention programs.
2. Local media should promote zero tolerance of youth violence in programming and news reporting.
3. Parents and other community partners should become more involved in schools to promote positive role models and enhance a safe learning environment.
4. Increase accountability of students and teachers in the school setting to raise academic performance through professional development for instructors and character development programs for students.
5. Encourage a policy of zero tolerance for abuse within and surrounding the family structure through community and law enforcement agencies.
6. Establish community standards, reflecting values that encourage civility in public policy and set the tone for standards in our public schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions express the value judgments of the committee, based on the findings.

1. Both the public awareness and incidents of violence in our schools has increased in recent years.

2. The level and intensity of violence in our schools and community is very different than a generation ago.
3. The majority of students in Marion County Schools are doing well and feels safe in their schools.
4. The small percentage of students involved in violence follow national trends when tracking both their academic and behavioral characteristics.
5. Domestic violence and child abuse are consistent precursors for violent activities in children and young adults.
6. The lack of parental attention and involvement in the daily activities of children are contributing factors in school based violence.
7. Violent messages in the media take on greater significance to youth that lack more appropriate behavioral role models.
8. In some cases parents do not have the parenting skills necessary to provide the boundaries children need to become productive and safe adults. Some parents do not feel comfortable in the schools and therefore are not effective advocates for their children in the academic setting.
9. Fatherless homes create an atmosphere which places children at a higher risk of violence and gang activity. The need to belong to something is transferred from the family to the gang.
10. The schools do not effectively use parents as a resource for enhancing programs and the quality of life on their campuses
11. School based management has allowed an inconsistent message to be sent to the community on the "official " School Board policy relating to the tolerance of violence in schools.
12. The School Resource Officer is an effective tool for both the administration and students in schools.
13. There is a Crisis Management Plan, coordinated by Brian Marcum, Supervisor of Safe Schools, currently in place throughout the county school system.
14. There is a critical lack of communication in the transportation system in the school system. It is imperative that all buses be equipped with an external radio system, which enables drivers and aides to be in contact with base operations for safety purposes.
15. There are many programs currently in place in the county, which are effective in both the prevention and "turning around" of students. Their effectiveness could be increased with better awareness in the community as well as an increase in funding. *Some of these programs include*:

    Mad Dads, The Explorers, DARE - for 5th grade students, GREAT for middle school students, Project Graduation, YMCA Young Black Achievers, Faith-based youth organizations, CASA-Community Counsel Against Substance Abuse, Community policing, Boys & Girls Club, Boy Scouts, Take Stock in Children
16. Faith-based student activities are growing in the county and are serving a wide demographic base of students. However, the lack of transportation acts as a barrier to program growth, especially in the outlying areas of the county.
17. Because educators are being asked to be more involved in the behavioral problems of students, it is important that they receive the professional development training that is necessary to give them the tools to be successful.
18. There needs to be a more coordinated effort on the part of schools, faith-based organizations and the community to provide the most efficient delivery of services to our youth, especially considering the rural nature of the county and the lack of a mass transportation system.
19. Many of the students from the student panels shared that a large portion of the violence, which takes place on the campus, arises from conflicts and tension, originating in their neighborhoods and among conflicting peer groups. The school incidences are not necessarily stemming from school-based problems, but a result of these off campus conflicts.
20. Children and youth are looking to adults to set community and personal boundaries, which will guide them through development. Without adult imposed boundaries students look to peers and the media for the behavioral choices.
21. The study committee strongly supports prevention programs as a more effective and less expensive alternative to incarceration. It feels the responsibility lies in the community at large to promote such programs.
22. Effective solutions to the problem of youth violence will require a community-based effort perhaps with the establishment of community standards.
23. Further research on best practices of national, state and community programs focusing on the prevention and reduction of youth violence is necessary