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**The Anti-Violence  
Community School:**

**A Police/School  
Partnership Model**

**Summary Report**

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The views expressed in this working paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
INTRODUCTION OF THE PROJECT.....	1
A.    Initial Reactions to the Pilot Project.....	1
B.    Problems in Getting the Project off the Ground.....	1
C.    School-Based Police Presentation .....	2
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT.....	3
A.    Stages of Development.....	3
1.    Addressing Preliminary Issues.....	3
2.    Working Toward the Development of a Protocol.....	3
3.    Developing a Working Protocol for Responding to Violence in Schools .....	4
B.    Case Studies.....	5
C.    Responding to Violence in the School.....	5
D.    Time and Resources Invested .....	7
E.    Comments About the Partnership .....	7
EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT.....	9
A.    Project Partners' Assessment of the Pilot Project .....	9
1.    Perspective on the Future .....	10
B.    Students' Assessment of the Pilot Project.....	10
C.    Staff Assessment of the Pilot Project.....	12
GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ANTI-VIOLENCE COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROJECT.....	14
A.    Introduction of the Project.....	15
1.    Role for Educators .....	15
(a)    Identification of the nature and extent of the problem of violence in the school and in the community.....	15
(b)    Identify individuals and agencies in the community that can help you develop and implement the working protocol.....	16
(c)    Develop a strategy to introduce the project .....	16
(d)    Introduce the project and help all those involved better understand and support a collaborative effort.....	16
2.    A Role for the Police.....	20
(a)    Preparing police officers for what is involved in working with schools to address youth violence .....	20
(b)    Assisting in the development of a strategy for introducing the project	21
B.    Project Partners .....	21

1.	Implementation of the Project.....	21	
(a)	Setting the tone for the project.....	22	
(b)	Identify which incidents should involve the police.....	24	
(c)	Conduct a thorough investigation.....	25	
(d)	Collaboratively decide what would be the most effective way to respond to each incident.....	26	
(e)	Implementing the decision.....	28	
(i)	When a decision is made to arrest and charge.....	28	
(ii)	When a decision is made to use school disciplinary measures.....	30	
(iii)	..... When a decision is made to provide a warning		31
(f)	Providing follow-up on the response to violent incidents.....	31	
(g)	Conducting a reassessment of the protocol.....	32	
	SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....	33	
A.	Schools.....	33	
B.	Police.....	34	
C.	Systemic.....	34	

## FOREWORD

Communities across Canada are beginning to mobilize in an effort to address the phenomenon of violence in schools. However, the process of searching for solutions has been made difficult because of the shifting nature of the phenomenon and a lack of consensus about the definition of the problem. Some school violence problems such as the individual bully are familiar. Others such as intruders, inter-racial group conflict, and the presence of hard drugs, guns, gun replicas, and other weapons are relatively new.

School administrators have a variety of options available to them to address and prevent violence in schools. Conflict resolution, mediation, and positive peer culture programs are just a few of the choices. These prevention-oriented approaches have the potential to contribute significantly to a reduction of violence in schools and should be considered in any comprehensive plan to address the problem.

However, all programs have limitations, and some parents express concern about the prospect of their child being injured trying to mediate between students who are older, physically larger, armed, or violent. Some incidents are potentially dangerous, such as those involving intruders, for both students and staff. Schools need to be prepared in advance to confront a variety of violence problems and should consider a range of alternatives to meet their needs including working collaboratively with the police.

Some school officials do not feel police belong in the schools. It is certainly true that widely differing professional philosophies and mandates can make collaborative working partnerships between educators and police challenging. But what is important for communities to understand is that any partnership forged between police and schools will be uniquely their own and must evolve out of local community needs. All the partners involved control the process from planning to implementation.

Many persons tend to see the police as a law enforcement presence only. Just the thought of uniformed officers in schools is worrisome to some. However, community-based policing of the type used in the present project is a more contemporary approach to providing police services to schools and communities and puts officers in closer contact with the public they serve. Specially trained and non-uniformed officers available on-call and working in a collaborative partnership with school administrators can be very effective intervention/prevention agents as demonstrated in this report. But first, everyone concerned must find a way to assess and understand young peoples' fears with respect to violence and victimization.

What all adults need to keep in mind is that the perceptions of students, parents, and educators can vary widely when it comes to assessing the seriousness of any school violence problem. Students who are victimized, witnesses of school violence, and the larger student body need to know that school administrators can cope with, contain, and prevent violence across a continuum of behaviours ranging from pushing and shoving, to racial slurs, homophobic comments, sexual harassment, intruders, and wounding with a weapon.

Educators also need to keep in mind that incidents we as adults may view as minor, such as simple assaults or threats, can have a debilitating effect on victims and witnesses and impair their ability to

learn. Extortion and intimidation if left unaddressed can create a sense of fear in hallways, classrooms, and the school yard and "poison" the learning environment for all students.

Just a few violent students can seriously affect the social climate of an entire school for a very long period of time. A single incident of a gun showing up at a school, if it is handled poorly by school administrators, can turn that institution into the "gun school". It is just this type of incident that requires schools to be well-prepared. A serious violent incident that is handled poorly by school staff can have long-term and serious consequences for students' and parents' perceptions of safety and the community's trust in school officials to keep and maintain a safe learning environment.

The intention of the present study was to document and evaluate the efforts of a school principal and a police officer to forge a working partnership to address a wide range of school violence problems. The model evolved slowly over time as school administrators and the officer worked together on an incident by incident basis, finding shared solutions, compromising, and searching for ways to respond in the most informed manner possible.

The philosophy of the program is based on "zero tolerance/selective sanction". Contrary to the opinions of some, the term "zero tolerance" does not mean "automatic expulsion". The philosophy guiding the project is "zero tolerance of violence" which is essential for keeping schools safe. It means confronting the violent act, providing demonstrated consequences for violent behaviour, and taking care to find solutions that are supportive to and do not simply punish the perpetrator. "Selective sanction" refers to the process followed by project partners when it comes to deciding how to respond to the incident. It involves gathering as much information as possible and considering all possible solutions to address the situation. For example, mitigating circumstances, victim impact, and the perpetrator's previous involvement in violent incidents are all weighed carefully before a decision is made. Every attempt is made to ensure that victims and the non-offending student majority will be safe and that the perpetrator's education does not unduly suffer. Decisions are monitored and followed up to ensure their appropriateness.

The information contained in the pages of this report captures the struggle and sincere efforts of caring professionals to find a way to work together to address violence in schools. The project partners made an extraordinary effort to transcend the boundaries of their professional mandates to find a way to make schools safe and respond in a way that was pro-victim, pro-perpetrator, pro-youth, and pro-community. The model that evolved, and is continuing to evolve, should provide an inspiration and a path for other communities to follow. It had an immediate effect on lowering the level of violence in the school and had a measurable impact on reducing the level of fear in female students. The impact this program has had on the school environment is remarkable and it is enthusiastically supported by staff, students, and parents alike.

Communities must respond to the phenomenon of youth violence and violence in schools on their own terms taking into consideration financial and human resources, population demographics, and local needs. The program model presented in this report is one of many possible approaches. Whatever model a community decides to implement the most important thing is that it be supported by students, parents, police, and other community partners, and be continually assessed and evaluated for its impact on violence levels and students' perceptions of safety.

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Special acknowledgement must also be given to project partners principal Jim Matresky, vice-principals Annie Cornelis and Ashley Waltman at D.A. Morrison, and constable Dave Nolan of the District #5 Street Crime Unit of the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force. Their courage and commitment to struggle past all obstacles to work together to make this school safe for all students is exemplary.

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## **INTRODUCTION OF THE PROJECT**

The following pilot project was implemented in a middle level school in southern Ontario. The school consists of grades 7, 8, and 9. The student population is approximately 550. A total of 457 and 397 of the students participated in the pre- and post-test assessments respectively.

This particular middle level school was dealing with fairly typical kinds of violent behaviour in students. They were primarily concerned with the small percentage of students who were causing the majority of the problems, and the additional problems provided by outsiders or intruders.

### **A. Initial Reactions to the Pilot Project**

The Principal's initial reaction to the request to pilot the project was "No, thank-you." However, he decided to approach the school's Chairperson and his staff members with the idea and let them decide whether or not the school would pilot the project. He then organized a meeting of the school's Chairperson's committee and found them to be solidly in support of the project. However, they too wanted the school staff's full support. The Principal then asked the police officer to provide his staff with details of the project, its purpose and objectives. The police officer spent 45 minutes responding to their questions. Following the presentation, the Principal asked his staff to indicate their level of support. It was unanimous. The staff totally supported implementation of the project.

### **B. Problems in Getting the Project off the Ground**

Once support had been obtained from those directly involved in the development and implementation of the project, school administrators and the police officer began soliciting support from students, parents, and the rest of the community in order to get the project up and running. The school administrators anticipated that they would have to address some potential misperceptions or negative attitudes that some parents may have had about having a police officer assigned to the school.

School administrators and the police officer reported that at the outset of the project they began to have problems with some parents who believed that the presence of a police officer meant that the school was unsafe. This type of negative publicity about the project was potentially harmful not only to the success of the project, but to the functioning of the school. Shortly following the introduction of the project eight parents approached another local junior high school to have their children transferred. From their perspective, the school was not safe for their children. Regardless of the lengths taken to educate parents and the community about the project using letters and articles in the school newspaper, some refused to believe that a project involving a police officer was designed to develop a safe and positive learning environment.

In addition to sending letters home to parents and publishing a description of the pilot project in the school newspaper, the partners introduced the project to all involved through the use of a school-based police presentation.

### **C. School-Based Police Presentation**

The purpose of the presentation was to enable the police officer to introduce himself to the students, staff and parents and to discuss the pilot project. The content of the presentation included:

- a discussion on violence and crime in schools;
- an open discussion on the types of incidents which are classified as "violent";
- a look at how to deal with violence on an individual basis;
- an explanation of how the school and police would jointly deal with violence;
- an outline of the specific procedures involved and the roles to be played in dealing with each violent incident; and
- a brief question and answer period.

Students, staff and parents were informed about the project and were made aware of their own individual responsibilities with respect to helping to reduce or eliminate violent behaviour in students. The need to report all incidents of violence was highlighted.

The response to the introduction of the project was overwhelmingly positive. The majority of the students, staff, and parents supported the implementation of the project.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT**

The development and implementation of a working protocol for the police officer and school administrators went through a variety of stages. These stages were part of an evolutionary process which helped the project partners find a way to work together effectively and collaboratively to address the issue of violence in this school. A summary of the development and implementation of the working project protocol is provided below.

### **A. Stages of Development**

Essentially, the development of the working protocol went through three stages: 1) addressing preliminary issues; 2) working toward the development of a protocol; and 3) developing the working protocol for responding to violence in schools.

#### **1. Addressing Preliminary Issues**

In order to begin to deal with their violence problems, the school administrators first had to address a number of preliminary issues: 1) they had to acknowledge that a problem existed; 2) they undertook a comprehensive identification of the problem; and 3) they worked toward building relationships with others in the community, like the police, who could assist them in responding to the problem more effectively.

#### **2. Working Toward the Development of a Protocol**

Once the school addressed the preliminary issues, they began working toward the development of a working protocol. In order to develop the protocol, the school had to first establish the purpose and objectives of the project. The purpose and objectives set the parameters for the project and provided a basis for measuring its success. The purpose of the Anti-Violence Community School project was: 1) to create a safer learning environment for the students; 2) to develop a better working relationship with the police; and 3) to help protect students outside of the school's immediate environment. Seven principle objectives were established to guide the development of the project:

- To develop and implement ways of addressing youth violence in and around the school;
- To develop an evolving protocol between the school and the police to deal with youth violence in and around the school;
- To encourage victims and witnesses to come forward to report violent incidents so they may be addressed by the project protocol;
- To raise awareness among educators and the general public about the problems and risk factors associated with youth violence and how those problems and factors effect the school environment;
- To develop a strong police/educator relationship;

- To identify problems with existing policies, Acts of Legislation, and practices within education, criminal justice, and social services that impede the development of a partnership response to violence in schools; and
- To make an ongoing assessment of the project's responses to incidents of school violence.

In order to begin developing a working protocol, the school had to also establish and maintain stakeholder support. In the development of the Anti-Violence Community School working protocol, it was important to establish and maintain support of the students, staff, parents, and the larger community.

### **3. Developing a Working Protocol for Responding to Violence in Schools**

Development of the working protocol began by determining criteria for reporting incidents to the police. The basic parameters established for police involvement included incidents involving: repeat offenders; assaults causing bodily harm; weapons; and intruders. The police officer was also to be called in for more preventive types of assistance. Once a decision was made to involve the police, a thorough investigation was conducted by both the school administrators and the police officer. The police officer trained the school administrators in basic investigative techniques such as taking statements and photo identification of the perpetrator.

Based upon the results of the investigation, the project partners decided how to deal with the incident. This decision was based upon information obtained during the investigation and any additional information that the police officer and school administrators may have had about the victim or perpetrator. Information shared included such things as: perceived seriousness of the incident; personal history of both perpetrator and victim; past or present criminal involvement of the perpetrator; project partners' past experiences with similar incidents; victim impact statements; witness statements; statements from both the victim's and perpetrator's parents; thoughts about the needs and rights of the accused, victims, and the rest of the students and staff; and whether or not an incident could conceivably go to court. Based on this information the project partners decided together to use one or more of a combination of the following options: 1) arrest and charge; 2) school disciplinary measure; or 3) warning.

Implementing the decision required further discussion between the project partners about subsequent roles and responsibilities. If the decision was to arrest and charge the partners had to address issues such as bail conditions, holding the perpetrator in custody until the bail hearing, preparing all those involved for court, and taking advantage of opportunities to educate judges and lawyers about the project. If the partners selected a school disciplinary measure, the decision involved discussions around the protection of the victim and the rights of the perpetrator to an education. The partners attempted to balance these issues as best they could in the implementation of their selected response. School administrators and the police officer sometimes just issued warnings. Decisions about giving a warning included a consideration of the nature of the warning and who would be the best person to give it.

Once the decision was implemented, follow-up was conducted. Parents of the victim and perpetrator and the victim and perpetrator themselves were appraised of the situation and kept informed about more long-term measures such as the court process in cases where arrests were made and charges laid. Those involved were provided with the opportunity to discuss how they felt

about the way the incident was handled. Periodic information sessions were also provided to interested staff, parents, and School Board members about the progress of the project. All of this data was assessed and then used in the further development of the working protocol.

## **B. Case Studies**

Comparing various scenarios which occurred prior to and after the implementation of the protocol, it was possible to assess the impact the protocol had on violence in this school. The assessment indicated that the implementation of the working protocol: 1) provided options to students other than using violence to fight violence; 2) changed parents' and the community's perceptions of the school and their partnership with the police; 3) created greater confidence among school administrators and the police to respond to all incidents of violence; 4) encouraged victims to report incidents; 5) prevented potentially volatile situations from escalating into more serious forms of violence; 6) facilitated the sharing of information between the school and the police; and 7) provided an atmosphere of trust that helped school administrators and the police officer be better able to make compromises in the development of appropriate responses.

## **C. Responding to Violence in the School**

Logs completed by the project partners on the nature of and the response to each incident provided the basis for further assessing the development and implementation of the working protocol. The logs indicated that a total of 46 incidents were addressed through the project protocol during the four month pilot. The majority of incidents occurred within the first five weeks of the project, and then dropped markedly to one or two incidents per week. The majority of the incidents occurred during or immediately after school. Many took place off school property. The Figure 1 diagram demonstrates the impact of the project on the level of violence.

The nature of the incidents responded to during the four month pilot was diverse. Over one-third of the incidents were assault related, and approximately one-fifth involved thefts. The nature of the remaining incidents, though less frequent in occurrence, included such things as: sexual assault; possession of weapons or dangerous weapons; uttering threats; harassment/intimidation; extortion; trespassing; and failing to comply with existing bail conditions for previous offences.

A total of 58 perpetrators were involved in the 46 incidents. Over three-quarters of these incidents involved only one perpetrator. The majority of the perpetrators were male. The average age of the perpetrators was 14.4 years. There was a remarkable number of dropouts among the perpetrators.

The total number of victims was 35. Over one-half of the victims were male. The average age for school-aged victims was 13.1 years. There were a number of adult victims involved in four of the incidents, primarily parents of the students. The results indicate that both the youth victims and perpetrators tended to be male. The victims were typically younger than the perpetrators and in lower grades.

Perpetrators were almost as likely to get a strong warning as they were to be arrested and charged. A total of 47 charges were laid in relation to 21 incidents. Over one-half of the 47 charges were laid in relation to one incident involving the arrest of four students for their participation in an organized youth crime ring. The range of charges laid in the 21 incidents varied from attempted theft to assault causing bodily harm. Over one-quarter of the charges laid were for "assault."

School disciplinary measures were used in five of the incidents. In four out of these five incidents, the perpetrators were transferred to another school or classroom in order to protect the victim. In the remaining incident, the student was suspended for three days for carrying a knife.

#### **D. Time and Resources Invested**

Throughout the duration of the pilot project, school administrators and the police officer kept logs of the amount of time they spent addressing incidents of violence. The logs indicated that the police officer invested approximately 207 hours over the four month pilot period. This does not include

the hours he spent in proactive police work, but simply in responding to incidents. Nearly one-half of the total amount of time and resources invested by the police officer occurred during the first five weeks of the pilot project. An additional 22% of the total police time investment was in response to one incident which occurred in the final week of the project and resulted in the arrests of four students who were involved in an organized youth crime ring. The time and resources required by the police officer for the remaining 14 weeks of the project was, on average, approximately 4.5 hours a week, less than one hour per day. The majority of the police officer's time was spent filling out forms and preparing reports.

The school administrators spent a total of approximately 43 hours addressing the 46 incidents. This does not include the time they spent addressing incidents that did not involve the police. They spent the highest percentage of their time dealing with the police officer, closely followed by their time spent with the victims and perpetrators. The police officer spent approximately four times the amount of time dealing with these violent incidents as the school administrators.

Another point of interest for this project was the police response time to calls for service from the school. The average response time was 15.28 hours. This number is somewhat deceiving because there were a number of incidents that had to be addressed after the weekend or could not be addressed immediately because the victim or perpetrator was not at school. The range of response time was from 0 to 192 hours. A response time of zero indicates that there was an immediate response because the officer was already at the school when the incident occurred. This occurred in nearly 4 out of every 10 incidents.

#### **E. Comments About the Partnership**

The comments of both the school administrators and the police officer about their working relationship were overwhelmingly positive. The school administrators commented on: the quick response time to most incidents; being kept fully informed about each investigation; the fact that they were now able to deal more effectively with intruders; the importance of being able to share information; being able to reach compromises; helping students and parents; participating in decisions about laying charges and establishing bail conditions; and developing greater comfort levels for staff, students, and parents to report violent incidents. They encouraged the further sharing of information and experiences in the continual development of a working relationship with the police.

The comments provided by the police officer reflected much of what the school administrators had outlined as the successes of the project including: having an open invitation for him to drop-in at the school; being in a position to respond immediately to all incidents; being asked to discuss issues on prevention; calling on the police when the school administrators felt they needed help; presenting a united front to all project stakeholders; ongoing collaboration and sharing of information; and referring parents and other community members to the police for assistance. The police officer also encouraged the further sharing of information, particularly around issues such as the perpetrator's personal and criminal history.

## EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

An evaluation of the pilot project based upon the comments of the police officer, administrators, students, and staff indicate that it was successful in reducing violence and altering the overall atmosphere in the school. The majority of those surveyed believed the project had reached most, if not all, of its objectives. The nature of their responses are summarized below.

### **A. Project Partners' Assessment of the Pilot Project**

The response from the school administrators and the police officer was very positive. Both partners believed the project had achieved all of its objectives. One of the immediate reactions witnessed following the introduction of the project was boundary testing of the proposed protocol by both victims and perpetrators. Victims made requests to speak directly to the police officer, attempting to bypass the school administrators' participation. Perpetrators were interested in seeing exactly how serious the project partners were in following through with consequences. Both victims and perpetrators learned quickly that the school and the police were developing a collaborative working protocol that they intended to follow consistently.

Some of the other changes witnessed soon after introduction of the project had to do with the partners' roles and responsibilities in responding to incidents of violence. The school administrators noticed an immediate change in the amount of time and energy required to develop a working protocol. They indicated that a lot of time had to be devoted to developing trust between themselves and the police officer and to resolving differing expectations and professional philosophies and mandates. The police officer became immediately aware of the large role that intruders and outsiders played in the creation of many of the violent incidents. He also referred to the time and energy required to develop a level of comfort and trust between the project partners.

The project partners highlighted a number of other issues which they believed were good indicators of the relative success of their endeavour. According to the school administrators, the pilot had been successful in: re-establishing control of student behaviour inside and outside the school; developing a trust level between the project partners and between the partners and the students, staff and parents; encouraging victims to report incidents of violence; deterring perpetrators from becoming involved in or being continually involved in violent activity; and assisting in the professional development of both partners. The police officer identified some additional indicators of success including: the reduction of the level of violence both inside and outside the school; the growing insight and information that the school and the police officer gained through the sharing of information; and heightened public awareness of the nature and extent of violence in schools.

The police officer identified a number of advantages which he believed resulted directly from the development and implementation of the project. These included: obtaining an objective perspective on each institution's response to youth violence; the willingness to share information which was essential to the development of an appropriate response; fostering a new attitude toward dealing with violence outside the school; addressing the ignorance that school administrators had about the criminal justice process; the growing appreciation that the police and the school are beginning to have about each other's concerns; the police being able to lay the charges rather than the victims thereby reducing the chances of retaliation against the victim; and implementing immediate and observable consequences for violent behaviour.

## **1. Perspective on the Future**

With the development of a "working" protocol, there is always room for improvement. Although both partners were more than satisfied with the outcome of the four month pilot project, they offered a number of suggestions to improve the partnership arrangement. Both partners advocated for a more proactive component to the working protocol. At the outset, much time and energy was invested in responding to past and current violent incidents. It was hoped that as the project continues to reduce the level of violence, the school administrators and the police officer will be able to spend more time involved in the prevention of violent behaviour.

One of the primary issues for both partners in the continued development of the working protocol was addressing conflicts and concerns encountered in the implementation of the protocol. Both parties referred to the need to review and alter provisions of the policies and Acts of Legislation that govern what police and educators can and cannot do when responding to violent incidents. In particular, they advocated for clarification of and, where necessary, changes to the Education Act, the Municipal Privacy and Freedom of Information Act, and the Young Offenders Act to permit the sharing of relevant information about students involved in violent incidents.

The project partners also advocated for continuing to address any remaining misperceptions or negative attitudes about the project. In particular, they suggested addressing: parents who do not understand the nature of the project; the notion that "kids will be kids"; the belief that nothing significant will happen to a young person when they are involved in crime or violence; the attitude that asking for help means you cannot handle your own problems; and the misperception that the only police response to violent incidents is to lay charges. The partners also identified the need to challenge the misperception that the police and schools are working together for the primary purpose of criminalizing all young people's violent behaviour.

Other suggestions for continued development of the working protocol included the need to address victims' and parents' fear of retaliation for reporting violence. The project partners also advocated for continued professional development to enhance the effectiveness of the working partnership.

## **B. Students' Assessment of the Pilot Project**

The majority of the students reported in the post-test that they believed that the project had helped to reduce the level of violence at the school. Based on these responses it was expected that some of the students may begin to feel more safe as a result of the program, particularly while they were in school. However, the average response to feelings of safety both while in school and while on their way to and from school based on the pre- and post-test samples, were virtually identical lying somewhere in between feeling safe "Sometimes" and "Most of the Time".

The nature and extent of changes in feelings of safety are often difficult to predict. For instance, it was believed that it would probably take more than four months to acquire the trust of some of the students particularly for those who indicated in the pre-test that they were less likely to turn to others for help. For these students and some of the younger students who were found to be most fearful to begin with, the project may have, at this point, confirmed the seriousness of the issue of violence in schools. With time, the development of trust in the project, and a further reduction in violent incidents these students should also begin to feel safer at school.

We also anticipated an increase in the students' feelings of safety while on their way to and from

school based on the responses on the post-test which indicated that most of the students believed there had been some reduction in the level of violence outside of the school as a result of the program. However, based on the comments provided by some of the students in response to this and other questions, some students may have in fact become more fearful. For example, some students indicated that while they may have felt safer in school because of the police officer, the lack of the police officer's presence outside the school may have made them more aware of their potential risk. In addition, some of the students believed that much of the violence which used to occur inside the school was now being taken outside away from the scrutiny of the project partners thereby giving them the belief that they may now be victimized on their way to and from school.

Unfortunately, due to a difference in the number of students and those who specifically participated in the post-test compared to the pre-test, a proper assessment could not be made. Approximately 78% of the total number of students who completed the pre-test survey participated in the post-test assessment. In particular, the number of grade nine students was reduced by approximately 40% because these students were studying for the exams at the time of the post-test. Given these distinctions, caution must be exercised in interpreting what this may mean about the relative impact of the program on feelings given the differing sample sizes and the fact that the students who participated in the pre-test were not necessarily the exact same students who participated in the post-test.

Students did report, however, that they now felt more comfortable reporting violence to school staff and the police. Females and older students were more likely than males and younger students to report feeling more comfortable about reporting. They indicated that their increased comfort was primarily due to the fact that they now believed that something would be done to address their victimization. Male students and the younger students reported higher rates of victimization in the pre-test than female and older students. This, and the fact that the males were less likely to turn to others for help, suggests that it may take more time to gain their trust and faith in the project. Comments provided by these students indicated that they still feared retaliation or believed that they could handle the incident themselves.

The nature and emphasis of the comments provided by the students in response to questions about their preference when reporting to school staff versus the police revealed an interesting point. Reporting to school staff and the police still appears to threaten some students, but for different reasons. They still feared retaliation if they reported the incident to school staff whereas they feared that the issue may be taken more seriously than the victims deemed necessary if they reported it to the police.

Increased comfort in reporting incidents of violence appears, in part, to be the result of changing attitudes toward the police and the school's response to violence. Students indicated that the project had helped to alter their views of the police and the school's response to violence. They indicated that police involvement in the project helped them realize that the police care, that they can be trusted, and that they want to help students and staff address violence in their schools. Students also commented on their belief that the project had helped them understand that the school is taking the issue of violence seriously and that the administrators can take control and alter students' violent behaviour.

When students were asked to identify what they found most helpful about the project, many commented on police involvement. Others indicated that victims could now come forward because of increased feelings of safety. Students indicated that what they found least helpful about the

project was the limited time that the police officer was at the school and the fact that some violence still continued. They recommended an increased police presence in the school and the use of an additional female officer. Also, students wanted to see the officer involved in more prevention types of activities with them. Others suggested finding ways to increase reporting and create a more thorough awareness campaign prior to and following the introduction of the project. The majority of the students indicated that they wanted to see the project continue in the next school year.

### **C. Staff Assessment of the Pilot Project**

Staff perceptions of students' feelings of safety following the four month pilot period were difficult to assess given the different sample sizes for the pre- and post-test assessments. However, comments provided by the respondents indicated that they believed that there was still a lot of work to be done in encouraging the young people to have more confidence in the project. Building confidence in the new system was seen as essential for students with respect to their feelings of safety once they left the school. Staff members did not feel that the students felt much safer while on their way to and from school. They believed that the larger and less protected environment outside of the school still made students fearful regardless of the project.

The majority of the staff members felt safe at least most, if not all, of the time while at school. These feelings of safety existed for some of the staff members prior to implementation of the project. Most of the staff feared more for the students than for their own safety.

The staff members believed that the project had an observable impact on the level of violence within and, although less so, outside of the school. They indicated that the project had helped to lower violence by establishing boundaries and deterring or preventing particularly volatile situations. They did, however, also recognize that although the project had been able to reduce the level of violence at school, some of the students still felt unsafe.

Staff members indicated that the project had been successful in making students feel more comfortable about reporting their victimization to school staff and the police. One of the objectives of the project was to foster a relationship between students and school staff that would help to address the lack of trust between the two. The increased comfort levels exhibited among students who were coming forward to report their victimization points to the belief that they have begun to accomplish this objective. The project was also designed to foster a positive relationship between young people and the police. Putting a face and a name to the often feared and mistrusted "police officer", appears to have helped students feel more comfortable about coming forward to report violent incidents to the police.

Changing staff members' attitudes was also a focus of the project. Over the years increased levels of violence and the view that nothing was being done to seriously address student behaviours had given staff negative perceptions of the school administrators and the police. The majority of the staff indicated that the project had challenged or altered their perceptions of the police and the school's response to violence. Comments provided by the staff indicated that the closer interaction between the police and school administrators and staff in responding to incidents had altered their feelings about the police. The school administrators' investment in and backing of this project had forced the staff to reassess their impressions of the school's response to school violence. They indicated that they felt that the school was taking the issue of violence more seriously, and appeared to be more concerned about the students and less concerned about what the community thought about having a police officer at the school.

There is little question about the staff's perceptions of the relative success of the project. They indicated that what they found most helpful was that violent incidents were now being addressed through a protocol. The staff suggested increasing the opportunity for the sharing of information between project partners and the staff and students, and requested more feedback on the progress of the project. Staff members also advocated for increased awareness and prevention activities in the further development of the project protocol.

# GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ANTI-VIOLENCE COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROJECT

The overall success and effectiveness of the project was based on a number of important elements. The key element was the development of the project protocol.<sup>1</sup> This project protocol was essential in ensuring that all those involved knew what was expected of them and in turn provided a basis for evaluating the *process* involved in dealing with violence in the school.

**Table 1: Stages of Development**

<b>Stage 1</b> Addressing Preliminary Issues	<b>Stage 2</b> Working Toward the Development of a Protocol
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Acknowledging that a problem exists</li> <li>* Conducting a comprehensive assessment of the problem</li> <li>* Identifying the need for a working relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Establishing the purpose and</li> <li>* Establishing stakeholder support</li> <li>* Maintaining stakeholder support</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 3</b> Developing a Working Protocol for Responding to Violence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Determining if an incident requires police involvement</li> <li>* Conducting an investigation</li> <li>* Deciding how to deal with an incident</li> <li>* Implementation of the decision</li> <li>* Follow-up</li> <li>* Reassessment</li> </ul>	

Provided below is a set of guidelines gathered from the experiences of students, staff, and project partners involved in the pilot project which should be considered in the development of a collaborative response to violence in schools. The guidelines are directed at educators and the police.

## A. Introduction of the Project

There are two major components to the successful introduction of the pilot project. First, is the development of a comprehensive understanding of what the initiative is all about. Second, community consultation and obtaining the required support to implement the project.

## **1. Role for Educators**

There are two main areas of concern for educators in the development of a comprehensive understanding of the problem of violence in schools. The first is the need to recognize that they may have a problem in their schools and in their community. The second is to realize that they cannot nor should they be dealing with this problem on their own. They must find a way to begin working with other community partners in the development of a response to violence in their schools.

### **(a) Identification of the nature and extent of the problem of violence in the school and in the community**

Step 1: Acknowledge the problem.

Step 2: Make sure that you have a clear understanding of the nature of the problem in your school and in your community.

Step 3: Take advantage of the research expertise available in your community to help you devise the tools you need to develop a comprehensive understanding of the problem. Approach a local agency or university to assist. This is an effective way to begin building community partnerships. Outside agencies can provide you with an objective needs assessment and assist you in the development of an appropriate response.

Step 4: Be sure to make use of a variety of measures to get a comprehensive assessment of all the issues related to violence in schools. For example, make use of Self-Report and Victimization Surveys to help you understand the students who are or have been victims or perpetrators of violent activity at school. In addition, assess students' levels of fear and their perception of the problem of violence in the school. Examining the results of these types of studies will help determine the impact of violence on the students.

### **(b) Identify individuals and agencies in the community that can help you develop and implement the working protocol**

Step 1: Based on the results of your needs assessment, decide who you should approach to begin discussing how to best respond. These may be representatives from within your school or from outside agencies like the police, social services, or community resource persons. Select those who can best help you respond to the nature of the needs identified.

Step 2: Organize a series of meetings with all partners to discuss the nature and extent of the problem. Share information about your experiences with youth violence.

Step 3: Develop a consensus about the problem and about how partners' knowledge and skills can be blended together to produce an optimal response to violence in and around the

school.

Step 4: Establish a clear understanding about the roles and responsibilities of partners.

Step 5: Establish the purpose and objectives of the proposed response. Ensure that the purpose reflects the needs identified and that the objectives provide you with a way to measure the impact of the project.

**(c) Develop a strategy to introduce the project**

Step 1: Ascertain who will be affected by the proposed project. Share experiences and perceptions with all partners about how others might respond to the proposed project.

Step 2: Anticipate challenges and negative attitudes as a result of the introduction of the project. Develop a comprehensive understanding of what will be needed to address these challenges.

Step 3: Ensure that all partners in the project will provide a united front to anticipated challenges to the introduction of the project. For example, trustees and School Board members must follow through on their support for their school administrators if someone calls them to complain about the introduction of the project or to have it removed from the school.

**(d) Introduce the project and help all those involved better understand and support a collaborative effort**

Step 1: Introduce the project at the beginning of the school year. Introduction of the project later in the school year may reduce your chances of success. Once you are well into the school year, the students will have already established their groups and a "pecking-order." It may be difficult to address students' fears once they have become patterned as a reaction to school violence.

Step 2: Develop and provide separate ways of introducing the project to all those who will be affected by its implementation. The nature of the introduction of the project should be geared to the needs of the different audiences.

Step 3: A number of important variables need to be addressed when introducing the project to *students*:

- **The presentation should be developed in a way that will maintain students' interest and attention.** Students themselves suggest the use of audio-visual materials to help emphasize the nature and severity of violence in schools. These include video tapes or presentations provided by young people who have been victims or perpetrators of violent activity.
- **Information provided should address the needs identified in the comprehensive assessment of the problem.** For example, discussions about how the project will deal with incidents such as swarmings when swarmings were not identified as a problem for students in the school will only serve to alienate the

young people and raise their concerns about an issue that is not particularly relevant to their community.

- **Use the results obtained from the Self-Report and Victimization Surveys to highlight how the working protocol will be administered.** Describe in as much detail as possible the responsibilities of each project partner.
- **Provide ample opportunity for students to ask questions and raise concerns about the proposed project.** Anticipate possible concerns about the perceived seriousness or leniency of the proposed response or concerns that a police presence will reflect negatively on the school.
- **Be sure to find ways of getting feedback from the students.** It is important to know at the outset whether or not you have support from the students. Lack of support from a high percentage of students will make it difficult to implement the project. Use additional surveys or individual classroom discussions following the presentation to assess their support.
- **Emphasize the need to report incidents of violence and the protection that is available for those who come forward.** Some discussion should take place around the notion of being a "rat." Be alert to the fact that this a sensitive issue for students.

*N.B. Staff members should be present during the presentation to students. Observing the students' reactions to the proposed plan will help them identify what they may expect when the project is implemented.*

Step 4: The focus of the presentation to *staff* should be about empowering them to feel that they will now be better able to deal with students' violent behaviours.

- **Include a discussion of their roles and responsibilities in helping to identify students who are victims or perpetrators of violent incidents.** Their daily involvement with the students makes them privy to information about students' behaviour in and outside of school that administrators, the police, and other partners may need to know.
- **Outline a step-by-step procedure for responding to events that they have witnessed or heard about regarding student involvement in violent activity.** Staff should be encouraged to report incidents to school administrators without fear that it will be interpreted as a sign that they cannot handle their students.
- **Provide staff with information about the consequences of violent behaviour as it applies to their own treatment of students.** Opportunity should be provided for staff to raise questions about whether such things as "grabbing a student by the arm" could result in their own arrest. Parameters around their own conduct with students should also be established.
- **Discuss the development of procedures for providing feedback to staff about the specific response to individual incidents and the progress of the**

**project.**

Step 5: When introducing the project to *parents and the community*, schools need to consider the needs of parents. For example, literacy level, language spoken, and cultural background are only some of the issues that have to be acknowledged when attempting to disseminate information about the project.

Step 6: Develop a variety of ways to reach out to and involve parents and other members of the community. This will assist in ensuring that as many parents as possible understand the purpose and objectives of the project. It will not guarantee support, but it may decrease the chance that parents will react negatively to the idea because they misunderstood such things as why a police officer has been brought into the school.

- **Use school newsletters or newspapers to notify all parents about the meeting you will be holding to introduce the project.** Provide parents with a day and evening meeting and ask them to indicate which one they would like to attend. Completed forms should be mailed back or returned with students. Parents who have not responded can be contacted by phone.
- **The nature of the information presented to the parents should reflect the kinds of things identified by and discussed with staff members.** Empowering parents to feel that they too have a major role to play in dealing with violence in and around the school is essential.
- **Emphasis should be placed on parents' roles and responsibilities in helping their children to understand and respect the new protocol.** Ask parents to discuss the new project with their children on a regular basis.
- **Discuss some of the issues related to students' fears of reporting violent incidents to school staff or the police.** Ask parents to encourage their children to disclose their victimization to someone whether it be the parent him/herself, the school, or police.
- **Provide specific information about what parents should do in the event that their child does disclose information about his/her victimization.** Encourage the parents to call the school rather than the police officer directly, but let them know that this is an option which they can pursue if they feel it is necessary.
- **Provide ample opportunity for the parents to ask questions or express their concerns about the proposed project.** Expect them to have some concerns about the nature and extent of the violence in the school. Parents may be unaware of the problem with violence in the school because of their children's unwillingness to talk about their own or other students' victimization. Find ways to reassure them that although the violence does exist, the proposed project will provide their children with protection and will reduce the level of violence in the school. Listen to their ideas and incorporate them wherever possible.
- **Some parents may be unable or unwilling to attend a meeting about the project.** Ask other parents who do attend to contact some of those who did not attend the meeting to explain what they heard.

*N.B. Parents are an integral part of the solution. Encourage and invite them to participate in the design of the program or in any way they can.*

Step 7: When attending scheduled meetings of area *Principals or Vice-Principals*, take advantage of the opportunity to share the nature of your project with other administrators. Help them to understand why the project is being introduced and how it will work. Allow them the opportunity to ask questions or raise their concerns about your efforts. Ask them to share the information about the project with others in their schools and their community. How you introduce the project will have a major impact on its implementation, functioning, and success. It is important that the community see this as a collaborative effort right from the start.

## **2. A Role for the Police**

Dealing with youth violence is often viewed as the responsibility of the police. However, this becomes complicated when police are asked to respond to violence in schools. School administrators and the police themselves must not assume that all officers are prepared or trained to participate in school-police partnerships.

Specialized police teams such as the Street Crime Units in Toronto are specifically designed to respond to incidents of school-based violence. Officers in these units have the training and the knowledge required to identify and respond appropriately to this type of violent activity. In the event that such a unit does not exist, the following guidelines should be used to prepare police to begin working in collaboration with the schools.

### **(a) Preparing police officers for what is involved in working with schools to address youth violence**

Step 1: Contact specialized units like the Street Crime Unit in Toronto to learn about their model and the types of training they receive to deal with violence in schools.

Step 2: Create opportunities to share knowledge and experience in the area of youth violence with educators, social service agencies, and parents.

Step 3: Incorporate information gained from these sessions into the development of appropriate training programs for those officers who will be involved in the local project.

Step 4: Approach schools in the area, or be responsive when schools approach you, to discuss the possibility of working together to confront the problem of violence in the schools or in the community.

*N.B. When approaching or being approached by educators be sensitive to the fact that their previous experiences with the police may not have always been positive. Respect the fact that you are being invited into their "territory." Offer your assistance in a manner that will be viewed as helpful, not intrusive.*

Step 5: Care must be taken to appropriately match an officer with a particular school, school administrator, and community. The development of a working partnership between

schools and the police is a relatively new phenomenon. The school and the police have traditionally operated under their own mandates without much assistance from other organizations. The development of this type of working relationship is challenging at the best of times. You will increase the chance of success and reduce the chance of conflict if you remain aware of the potential problems and challenges.

Step 6: Develop a comprehensive understanding of the problem. Ask questions about the nature of the violent activity in the school and how administrators have routinely responded.

Step 7: Ensure that the purpose and objectives of the project reflect the basic principles of community-based policing. For example, ensure that they reflect both a reactive and proactive response and that they are designed to address the needs identified by the community.

### **(b) Assisting in the development of a strategy for introducing the project**

Step 1: Participate in meetings designed to assess possible responses to the proposed project from students, staff, parents, and the community. Share your knowledge and experience relative to the groups' anticipated reactions to police involvement. Discuss your perceptions of current attitudes toward the police and how they may assist or impede the introduction of the project.

Step 2: Discuss the nature of your role in introducing the project. Emphasize the importance of your presence during the presentations in order to reinforce that a partnership exists and to provide the students, staff and parents with an opportunity to put a face and a name to the "police officer."

Step 3: Identify how your knowledge and experience can best be used to introduce the project. For example, discuss how the students may take a proposed zero tolerance to violence policy more seriously if introduced by the police officer.

Step 4: Identify the role you can play in presentations to students, staff, and parents. For instance, you may want to take the lead when talking to students to emphasize that there are consequences for engaging in violent activity. On the other hand, the school administrator may want to take the lead at the staff presentation to discuss the introduction of the project in order to address the concerns staff may have.

*N.B. Provide educators with an opportunity to indicate what they believe your role should be. Remember that you are being invited into their school to help them respond to what they may perceive as their problem.*

## **B. Project Partners**

### **1. Implementation of the Project**

Successful implementation of the project will depend, in part, on the way in which you introduce it. Once the project begins, expect boundary testing by some of the students and other young people from outside the school. Also, clarify the specific roles and responsibilities of each partner in the implementation of the project. Below are some of the steps required to address these and other

issues.

**(a) Setting the tone for the project**

Step 1: Expect some negative or challenging reactions from students and parents in response to the implementation of the project.

- **Students may be curious about the role and involvement of the police.** They may approach school administrators and ask to talk to the police officer directly. Their requests may be based on idle curiosity or a real need and desire to speak to the officer about their victimization.
- **Encourage students to *first* report the incident to school staff.** School administrators must then decide if the issue should be referred to the police officer. This procedure is not intended to deprive students of the opportunity to talk to the police officer, but rather to make optimal use of police resources and reinforce that the school has the primary responsibility for student safety.
- **Expect that some students will want to test the process of responding to violent activity.** Some may put their "feelers" out to see what is going to happen. Some will want to know what the rules of the game are and, once they understand what the consequences are and for what types of activity, they may hesitate to cause any trouble within the confines of the school. Others will be more interested in determining whether or not what they understood about the project was in fact true and want to see what they can get away with.
- The manner in which you respond to the first two or three incidents will greatly effect the success of the project. **Be sure to follow through on your proposed response immediately.** If students see that even one incident is mishandled, they will take advantage of it, thereby seriously damaging the project's potential to encourage victims to come forward.
- **Intruders or young people who hang around outside the school, but who do not attend the school, may also want to test the project partners.**
- **Deal with these incidents immediately and effectively from the outset.** News travels fast among young people. Follow through on the proposed consequences for violence whether it occurs inside or outside the school when your students are involved. Effectively handling incidents will deter other young people from victimizing your students.
- **Persons who do not support the project may attempt to dismantle it.** One way they may attempt to do this is by pitting one partner against the other in an effort to weaken the response. Another may be to discredit the project by pitting school trustees or board members against school administrators.

- **It is essential that the project partners and all members of their respective organizations from management on down present a united front in response to each incident.** It is important that the community see that this project has the support and backing of all those involved.

Step 2: Be prepared to invest some time and energy at the outset of the project to develop trust between project partners. The relationship required to work collaboratively may be very different from what many police officers and school administrators have been used to. A high level of trust is required in order to allow partners to be able to fulfill their own roles and responsibilities without having to monitor what the other is doing. **To assist in the development of trust, project partners must:**

- **Develop an understanding of what each partner's role will be.** Be prepared to deal immediately with any unrealistic expectations that the partners or the students, staff, and parents may have about anyone's role.
- **Recognize that each partner will no longer be able to operate exclusively under the protocols governed by their individual professional mandates.** Immediately address any significant differences in philosophies with respect to how best to respond to the violent activity.
- **Be prepared to make compromises in the development of a working protocol.** Find ways to blend the nature of the responses proposed by each partner. Compromises are essential to the work of the project.

Step 3: School administrators should be trained in police investigative techniques. Training should include such things as:

- taking proper statements from victims and witnesses;
- determining when and where to take the statements; and
- how to conduct a witness or victim photo identification of the perpetrator(s).

Other training components may be added as needed.

Incidents of violence must be addressed *on a case-by-case basis*. With each individual incident, the following actions should be taken: 1) decide whether or not to involve the police and how; 2) conduct a proper investigation; 3) decide how to deal with the incident; 4) implement the decision; 5) follow-up on the impact of the decision; and 6) reassess the process of how decisions were made and any impact of the action taken.

**(b) Identify which incidents should involve the police**

Step 1: **Establish general parameters around the types of violent activity that may warrant police involvement.** These are typically those cases which "*could conceivably go to court.*" For example, those cases involving:

- physical injury to the victim;

- group-related assault or violent activity;
- weapons<sup>2</sup>;
- incident is a repeat occurrence, especially when previous disciplinary measures that the school has tried have not worked;
- the student has been arrested before (the school may be unaware of the student's previous criminal history, but if there is any doubt, they should contact the officer to run a background check); and
- intruder-type incident. School administrators may feel that they have little, if any, control over the behaviour of young people who do not attend the school. Where there is any question about dealing with intruders or outsiders, calling in the police officer will provide the school administrators with the support they need to make sure that these young people do not continue to cause problems for the school.

*N.B. School administrators should discuss with the police officer the kinds of things that are required to be able to prosecute a case in court. It is important for the overall success of the project that decisions which are made at the school are supported by the courts. Otherwise, the project partners will lose their credibility with students.*

**Step 2: As the project progresses you may want to bring the police officer in to provide, more proactive types of intervention such as:**

- **Provide warnings to perpetrators.** Incidents may occur at the school that could be regarded as minor in nature, but may cause some concern because of the potentially volatile nature of the incident or perpetrator. As a preventive measure, the police officer may be brought in to give the perpetrator a warning about the consequences of continuing the behaviour. This may be particularly useful in situations where school administrators are concerned that the incident might occur again or result in retaliation against the victim for reporting the incident.
- **Counselling victims.** In incidents where victims may be hesitant to fully disclose their victimization, the police officer may be brought in to ensure their safety from retaliation. Fearful victims may be more likely to believe that the police officer can provide them with protection.
- **Act as a mediator.** Some incidents may be the result of ongoing disputes between young people or the result of existing racial conflict among some students. Such incidents often begin with verbal harassment and escalate to physical assaults. Given the police officer's training in dealing with potentially hostile situations, the school may want to call him/her in to mediate if they lack this expertise. The officer's warning may be taken more seriously by some students than a warning from a school administrator.

**(c) Conduct a thorough investigation**

Step 1: **After a decision has been made about whether or not to call in the police officer, a more thorough investigation must be conducted to decide how best to respond to the incident.** The decision about how to proceed must be based upon all available information. Deciding who will conduct the investigation will depend on whether or not the officer has been called in to assist or the officer's availability.

Step 2: If the police are to be involved, the school should contact the officer to notify him/her of the incident and to ask when he/she will arrive at the school. If the officer is able to respond immediately, most of the investigation can be conducted by him/her.

Step 3: If the officer is unable to get to the school immediately, it is important that the school administrators begin the investigation. It is important that a project partner respond immediately because:

- **Any delay in responding to reported incidents of violence places the victim at risk of further victimization from the perpetrator.** When victims do not see an immediate response, they may feel that they are not being taken seriously. This reduces the chances of any victim coming forward in the future.
- **Perpetrators must see an immediate consequence for their misconduct.** Any delay or gap in time between the commission of the act and a response enables the perpetrator to rationalize and deny responsibility for his/her behaviour. The delay may also provide perpetrators with ample time to "cover their butt" by coming up with a story or by getting rid of evidence.

Step 4: Making use of their training in police investigative techniques, the school administrators should begin by taking victim and witness statements. If necessary, a proper photo identification of the perpetrator should be conducted. Proper photo identification means not simply showing the victim or witness(es) one picture, but allowing them to select the perpetrator from a "photo line-up," such as a class picture.

Step 5: Following identification of the perpetrator, school administrators must alert the perpetrators and their parents that the incident has been referred to the police. This is necessary to ensure the protection of the victim and to deter the perpetrator from further victimizing him/her while awaiting the police officer's arrival. The accused must be informed that it would be in their best interest to remain out of trouble until the incident is resolved.

Step 6: Based on the information obtained from the victim and witness(es), school administrators must also consider whether or not any potential evidence related to the incident is at risk of being destroyed or tampered with. If the school administrator's believe that the perpetrators may taint the information or evidence to be given to the police officer, they should keep the perpetrators in their office until the officer arrives.

**(d) Collaboratively decide what would be the most effective way to respond to each incident**

Step 1: Once all of the required information has been gathered about the nature of the incident, the project partners should share what they have learned and determine how best to

respond.

*N.B. There may be a temptation to handle similar situations in a similar manner. Although the nature of the incident may be similar, the specific needs of the victim and perpetrator may suggest that the incident be handled differently.*

Step 2: Information to be shared in order to determine the best possible response to *each* incident should include:

- **Perceived seriousness of the incident.** Educators and the police should share their opinions about the perceived severity of the incident. The police officer may discuss the seriousness of the incident from a criminal justice perspective or personal experience. The school administrators may share their perceptions of how serious the problem is based on their knowledge about or past experiences with, the perpetrator.
- **Personal history of both perpetrator and victim.** Project partners should share what they know about the perpetrator and victim that may have some impact on the nature of the decision. The types of information that may be shared include the students' family history, school-related experiences, peer influences, and past history of involvement in school-based incidents of crime or violence.

*N.B. Discretion must be exercised when deciding whether or not to release or disclose this information about any individual. Some of the information may be obtained from the student's Ontario Student Record (OSR) which is protected by the Education Act. Disclosure of this information may be in contravention of the Act. Information should be released only if it is in the student's best interest or required by law.*

- **Past or existing criminal history of the perpetrator.** The police officer may choose to share information about the extent to which the accused has been involved in similar incidents outside the school. The officer may also choose to share information about any existing bail conditions that the perpetrator may have if he/she believes that the knowledge will help administrators to better understand the accused's inability to comply with rules.

*N.B. Disclosing information about the nature of the criminal activity conducted by students outside the school may be in contravention of the provisions for disclosure under the Young Offenders Act (YOA). The police officer will need to exercise good judgement when deciding what or if he/she should disclose any information.*

- **Sharing information about past experiences with similar incidents.** The project partners should share what they learned from their previous experiences to help formulate how they will best address the current incident.
- **Victim impact statements** should be shared with all those involved in making the decision. Attention should be paid to how the victim feels about the incident and the perpetrator. These statements may also identify the victim's fears about retaliation or

their desire to see the incident handled in a more harsh or more lenient manner.

- **Witness statements** should also be shared. Project partners should share information about the nature of the incident from the witnesses' perspective (where available). They should also discuss any conflicting information received from witnesses or their own concerns about what they saw.
- **Perceptions of both the victim's and perpetrator's parents.** These may have been garnered from conversations with the school administrators or the police officer. The information should address how the victim's parents felt about their child's victimization and their concerns and preferences about how the incident should be addressed. Similarly, the accused's parents' feelings about their child's behaviour should also be taken into consideration. Information they may have about the student's previous behaviour at home, their understanding of why the student may have engaged in the incident, and their concerns and preferences for how the incident is to be handled should be solicited.
- **Balancing the needs and rights of the perpetrator with the needs and rights of the victims and the rest of the students and staff.** Before any final decision is made about how to deal with the incident, the project partners should attempt to use all of the information available to them to find a way to act in the best interest of the perpetrator, victim, and the non-offending student majority. For example, the school may argue that given the accused's family history or the difficulty they may be having in school, a harsh penalty may only make things worse. The police officer may then argue that the victim or others may continue to be at risk if students saw the response as being too lenient or that the school would be setting a bad example if a harsher penalty was not used.
- **Determining whether an incident could conceivably go to court.** Opting for a criminal justice response should be based, in part, on discussions about whether or not the information gathered indicates that the incident could conceivably go to court. If unlikely, then a criminal justice response should be omitted from the discussion and the partners should concentrate on finding a more suitable response.

*N.B. Deciding on the best possible response will mean making compromises. Be prepared for the disagreements that will inevitably arise and focus on finding a workable, realistic solution for all concerned.*

Step 3: Based on the nature of the information that has been shared and discussed, the project partners must then decide how to deal with each incident. There are a number of options to select from: 1) arrest and charge; 2) use a school disciplinary measure; and 3) issue a warning. All of these measures should include some form of counselling from the school administrator and the police officer.

#### **(e) Implementing the decision**

Step 1: The parents of both the victim and the perpetrator, and the victim and perpetrator themselves, must be informed about the decision.

Step 2: School administrators and the police officer must decide who is going to inform whom. This decision should be directly linked to how the incident is going to be handled. For example, if it will be given a criminal justice response, the police officer should contact the parents because he/she has more knowledge in the area and can address any concerns or questions they may have. If a school-based disciplinary response is to be implemented, then school administrators should call the parents.

Step 3: Once everyone has been informed of the decision, the roles and responsibilities of all partners must be clearly defined.

**(i) When a decision is made to arrest and charge**

Step 1: The accused should be brought to the police station and the required forms completed.

Step 2: The youth should be brought before a judge or justice-of-the-peace to have bail conditions set or ordered to be held in custody until a bail hearing can be held.

- **Held in Custody:** Decisions about whether or not the young person is to be held in custody should be based on a number of issues. One is the perceived danger the young person poses to him/herself or others if they were released back into the community. The assessment of potential danger should be based upon the nature of the incident itself or the perpetrator's previous criminal history. An accused may also be remanded into custody upon their parent's/guardian's request.
- **Bail Conditions:** If the young person is not held in custody, the judge or justice of the peace may establish a set of bail conditions to be imposed upon the youth until the court date. Bail conditions are a set of standards or codes of behaviour that are imposed upon the young person and are enforceable by law. **In instances where bail conditions are to be set, the police officer should discuss the nature of the conditions with the school administrators.** The project partners should determine together the conditions needed to protect the victim yet still allow, where possible, for the perpetrator to continue his/her education. For example, the conditions may state that the accused is to have no contact with the victim and must attend each and every class. The school administrators and the accused's parents can then monitor the perpetrator's behaviour and if the young person violates his/her bail conditions, the police officer will be called in to either give the accused a warning or arrest and charge him/her for failing to comply with the bail conditions.

Step 3: School administrators and the police officer will need to work together to prepare for the accused's court appearance. The police officer should instruct the school administrators, staff, and students about what will be expected of them if and when they are asked to take the stand as victims or witnesses of the incident. The officer should try to make them all feel more comfortable about the judicial process and provide additional assistance to victims or witnesses that are hesitant about speaking out against the perpetrator for fear of retaliation.

*N.B. Many cases are tossed out of court because the victim or key witness(es) do not show up to give testimony. A lot of time and energy will be spent by everyone before making a decision to have the young person arrested and*

*charged for the incident. Consequently, the school and the officer should take extra precautions to ensure that their case is strong and able to be supported in the courts.*

Step 4: When dealing with hesitant victims or witnesses, the police officer may need to spend extra time to make them feel more comfortable about appearing in court and to ensure that they understand that what they are doing is in their own best interest. The officer may need to go as far as picking the victim or witnesses up at home or school, driving them to court, and sitting with them while they wait to be called to the stand.

Step 5: When dealing with school administrators, the police officer should help them understand the protocol for responding to questions posed by the court. To avoid wasting their time, administrators should not show up at the courthouse until instructed to do so by the police officer.

*N.B. Given the time and energy invested by both the school and the police in deciding to lay a charge, it is devastating to both parties when their efforts are undermined by the courts. The school administrators and the police officer should take every opportunity to explain the purpose and objectives of the project to judges and lawyers and ask for their support in ensuring the effectiveness of the project.*

**(ii) When a decision is made to use school disciplinary measures**

Step 1: When trying to decide what school-based disciplinary measure to use, project partners must attempt to find a way to balance the needs and rights of the perpetrators with those of the victims and the rest of the students and staff. Under the auspices of the project, "everyone, including the perpetrator, has a right to an education."

Step 2: School administrators and the police must **respond on a case-by-case basis to all incidents of violence**. Do not establish automatic or mandatory responses for any type of incident. No decision should be made until all information relevant to each individual incident is gathered and discussed. **Impose a zero tolerance to violence policy, but use "selective sanctions."**

Step 3: Project partners have a number of options at their disposal. They may decide on one or a combination of the following school-based options: suspension; transfer to another class; transfer to another school; or counselling or mediation. Expulsion may be considered in schools where School Board policies sanction such a measure.

*N.B. If you decide to transfer the student to another classroom or school, ensure that full disclosure about why the student is being transferred is made to the teacher or school involved. It is unfair to expect others to make an informed opinion about whether to accept the student when they do not know who and what they are dealing with. They have the right to balance the needs and rights of the one student with those of the other students and staff at the school.*

Step 4: Project partners may decide to respond to individual incidents using a school disciplinary measure on its own or in conjunction with another type of response.

**(iii) When a decision is made to provide a warning**

Step 1: If and when project partners decide to give a perpetrator a warning, a decision must be made about who will give it and what type of warning shall be given. In many instances, the decision about who will give the warning may be based upon who is available at the time. Generally, a warning given by the police officer is often taken more seriously by students. But the officer may not always be available to administer the caution. If the officer is at the school or if the warning involves a discussion about a possible criminal justice response, the police officer should talk to those involved. Otherwise, the school administrators, in collaboration with the guidance department, should talk to the students.

Step 2: Warnings should not only be given to the perpetrators involved. The information gathered may indicate that the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator poses ongoing risks to each other and other students. In these instances, the police officer or the school administrators should sit down with both parties and caution them about finding other ways to resolve their differences or risk the consequences. These sessions require mediation skills to facilitate. Given the police officer's training in dealing with potentially volatile situations, he/she or someone from the guidance department should talk to the students.

**(f) Providing follow-up on the response to violent incidents**

Once an incident has been addressed, a number of follow-up procedures are required in order to ensure that the response was appropriate for all those involved.

Step 1: Upon resolution of the incident, feedback should be provided to all those involved including the victim, perpetrator, parents of the victim and perpetrator, and the project partners. The feedback provided may include such things as how the decision was made, and, if necessary, the court process. Concerns or questions raised should be dealt with accordingly.

Step 2: A decision about who provides the feedback must be made. This decision will depend, once again, upon the way in which the incident was handled and the nature of the information presented.

Step 3: General information on the nature of the problems addressed by the project and the responses taken should be provided, on a periodic basis, to the school staff and interested parents. The information provided will give those interested an opportunity to better understand the nature of the problems associated with violence at the school. Given that the project is a community-based initiative, it is important that all those involved have an opportunity to see how it works and to raise any questions or concerns they may have about the process.

Step 4: More formal follow-up measures can be provided through an evaluation by a researcher and through the provision of reports written by the project partners. These

measures can be used in the continual assessment and development of the project protocol.

**(g) Conducting a reassessment of the protocol**

Step 1: At the conclusion of the response to each incident, the project partners should reassess their decisions. School administrators and the police officer should get together to share their thoughts about the response taken and evaluate their own and each other's performances. Assessments should be made concerning: how well they fulfilled their individual and collective roles and responsibilities; the decision making process; and satisfaction with the outcome. Criticisms should be shared and suggestions made for improvement.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This pilot project was an attempt to understand and respond to violence in schools. Those involved have provided leadership in the development of a working partnership between schools and the police in addressing school-based violence problems. The success of the project is documented in this report. A decrease in the level of violence and increase in comfort levels among students to report incidents of violence to school officials and the police are indicators of the project's impact. The nature of the positive working relationship established between the school administrators and the police officer is another indicator of its success.

While acknowledging the project's success, the difficulties and challenges encountered by the project partners in attempting to develop, implement, and evaluate the project cannot be ignored. Differing professional mandates and philosophies do not easily foster the development and maintenance of such collaborative arrangements between schools and police.

More must be done to ensure that the hard work provided by school administrators and the police is supported by trustees and members of the School Boards, as well as from lawyers and judges when an incident goes to court. A united front in the development of partnerships in responding to violence in schools is needed to ensure the development of safer schools for all students.

Following is a summary of recommendations that should be considered by those wishing to implement a similar project in their community.

### A. Schools

1. School Boards should consider developing mandatory suspension or expulsion policies for the possession of weapons in and around the school. Although the Criminal Code defines "possession of a weapon dangerous to public peace" as an offence, in case law, the mere possession of a knife does not necessarily constitute a danger to public peace. Consequently, the possession of a weapon, other than firearms, in and around the school for the purpose of protection is not always sufficient grounds for a criminal conviction. The possibility of suspension and expulsion policies may help students realize the seriousness of having a weapon in their possession while in or around school.
2. School Board policies must try to balance the needs and rights of victims and non-offending student majority with those of the perpetrators.
3. Revisions should be made to policies concerning what kinds of information can be recorded in the Ontario Student Record (OSR). School officials should be allowed to record all acts of violence or criminal behaviour in the student's OSR.
4. School officials should be privy to all information about a young person's behaviour prior to accepting a transferring student into the school.
5. Develop and implement policies and guidelines for *mandatory* reporting of violent incidents to police. Establish guidelines for the police and schools to work together to establish an individual school-based protocol for responding to school-based violence. Guidelines for

involving the police should also be developed for drug and hate-bias related incidents.

## **B. Police**

1. During times of fiscal constraint and cutbacks there may be a temptation to opt for the least costly way to respond to school-based violence. An effective response may require additional police time and resources at the outset, but in the long-term will lower the cost of policing by reducing and preventing violent incidents in schools. Initiated as a reactive measure, it builds quickly to prevent violence in schools.
2. Develop and support specialized police units designed to respond specifically to violence in schools. The unique training and knowledge required to work collaboratively with schools in dealing with incidents of violence on a prevention and intervention level is not possessed by every police officer on a force.
3. Provide training to police which emphasizes how incidents can escalate into serious violence in schools. Develop and implement training which directly addresses how to help police and others identify potentially volatile situations and diffuse them.

## **C. Systemic**

1. There is a need to address the conflicts that exist between the Municipal Privacy and Freedom of Information Act (F.O.I.), the Young Offenders Act (Y.O.A.), and the Education Act that hinder the development of an effective working partnership between schools and the police. The conflict is most apparent with respect to the disclosure of confidential information.
2. There is a need to address the delays involved in getting cases to court. When dealing with young people, it is essential that they receive immediate consequences for their criminal or violent behaviour. Delays in the court system compromise the working relationship between schools and the police as they attempt to provide an effective response.
3. There is a need to establish training programs for judges and lawyers about the seriousness of violence in schools. The training program should support the work of the schools and the police by reaffirming a *zero tolerance to violence in schools* policy.
4. Training programs are also needed to educate judges that the mere possession of weapons, such as knives, do constitute "a danger" to the school environment. They must be made aware that the knowledge that students may be carrying knives to school whether for protection or other purposes, creates a level of fear among students and staff which is detrimental to the learning environment of the school. Possession of weapons, even by only a few students, only encourages or forces others to resort to carrying their own for fear of being victimized.

<sup>1.</sup> A protocol is a set of specific guidelines which operationalize the purpose and objectives of the project. It identifies the roles and responsibilities for all those involved and provides a general step-by-step procedural response to violent incidents.

<sup>2.</sup> Mere possession of a weapon, with the exception of firearms, may not result in a conviction. Unless the weapon is used in an assault or in a threatening manner, the courts may not regard the possession of a knife in or around school as "dangerous to public peace." Regardless of the fact that the case may or may not go to court, when

a student is caught with a weapon, the police should still be called in.