



# SYSTEMSTATS

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North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center • Governor's Crime Commission

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## Preventing Violence in Schools With Community Policing

NCJRS

### An Evaluation Strategy for

SEP 22 1994

### The Robeson County School Outreach Program

ACQUISITIONS

#### First Findings

Juvenile violence in North Carolina continues to rise at an alarming rate, especially in our schools. The North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey, released July 1994, reports from 1990 to 1993 the percent of :

- ▶ *ninth-grade males carrying weapons (gun, knife, or club) increased from 36 to 49 percent;*
- ▶ *males carrying guns in the month prior to the survey increased from 9 to 20 percent for ninth-grade males and from 9 to 23 percent for twelfth-grade males.*

The report further documents that a significant percentage of students:

- ▶ *do not feel safe at school;*
- ▶ *stayed home from school one or more days in the month prior to the survey;*

- ▶ *reported being threatened or injured by a weapon on school property;*
- ▶ *had personal property stolen or deliberately damaged on school property.*

The Governor's Crime Commission recognizes that school violence is escalating and is doing something about it.

#### The Governor's Task Force

In February 1993, Governor Jim Hunt created the Governor's Task Force on School Violence to address this critical issue. He made the effort permanent by creating the North Carolina Center for The Prevention of School Violence. In addition, a number of school districts have initiated a series of interventions to address school violence. The impact of one such intervention, the Robeson County School Outreach Program (RCSOP),

is being evaluated by research supported by the Governor's Crime Commission.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this evaluation is twofold: one, to measure the impact of the RCSOP on school violence; two, to create an inventory of "best practices" for programs of this type that will be translated into a series of workable tools for other jurisdictions facing this problem.

### **The Robeson County School Outreach Program**

What is the RCSOP? It is a program that employs a multijurisdictional task force to place a sworn law enforcement officer in a number of targeted high schools in Robeson County, NC. Unlike many other School Resource Officer (SRO) programs nationwide that place uniformed officers in the schools, the RCSOP's SRO approach reflects a much more *comprehensive policy focus* that includes an integration of the resource officers' function with the existing social network of the community, specifically, the Department of Social Services, Juvenile Courts, the public schools and, of course, law enforcement.

### **Community Effort**

The RCSOP is a *community* effort to provide juvenile intervention *before*

court action becomes necessary. It is based on a premise that school violence is simply juvenile violence that happens to take place in a school setting. As a consequence of this premise, the RCSOP in many ways represents a community-policing effort in a school environment.

### **Social Impact**

In a fundamental sense, social interventions, of which RCSOP is an example, have a number of potential social impacts. However, the measurement of these impacts raises a number of important and difficult statistical, research design and practical issues. For example, not all the social impacts of a program can be measured with the same degree of precision, e.g. changes in "behavior" versus changes in "perception of climate."

Also, some program impacts cannot be measured until well into the future, as in the case of an early childhood intervention to prevent violence whose impact may be 10 years in the future. Some programs are inherently difficult to measure, e.g. a suicide prevention hotline. In addition, policy makers and policy analysts often attach different degrees of importance to various program elements and outcomes.

For example, to the elected policy maker, constituent perception of a problem is sufficient to warrant attention and resources, and changes in those same constituent perceptions are sufficient to conclude the problem has been "fixed." Policy analysts, on the other hand, generally demand "harder" measures of program success; however, these harder measures are typically logistically difficult (and at times impossible) to collect, and, the process of doing so is expensive.

### **Design Considerations**

In light of these theoretical and practical considerations, in designing the RCSOP evaluation, we have chosen four general dimensions for analysis. Three of these dimensions are specific to the Robeson county experience, one is national in scope. They are:

### ***Cost Effectiveness***

(1) Is RCSOP cost effective when compared to other approaches designed to address the problem? In other words, if we perceive juvenile violence as a "stream of consequences," we can choose as a society to address the problem "upstream," at its earliest expression, or, "downstream" when the juvenile engages in some violent act. The choice for the public is one that should take into account the

cost of the intervention. This leads us to attempt to address whether a program like the RCSOP saves money over and above the cost of basic operation when compared to other ways of dealing with school violence.

Our evaluation will monitor the program from a cost-effectiveness perspective. Specifically, Robeson County school resource officers keep children out of the courts, mainly by their direct efforts and with the aid of community resources. As we mentioned previously, juvenile violence is a stream of consequences and program interventions that have costs associated with them. Citizens will pay the costs of juvenile violence somewhere either upstream or downstream. Are interventions like RCSOP, which are more upstream in orientation, cost effective?

### ***Impact on School Climate***

(2) What is RCSOP's impact on school climate? If a school is not safe and orderly, education in any meaningful sense is not possible. If students, parents, and teachers believe that the climate of the school is such that they are in fear for their safety on a daily basis, this will obviously directly affect the educational process. Surveys of all participants are crucial in

evaluating the beliefs and perceptions of school climate.

### ***General Program Impact***

(3) What are the pre- and post-RCSOP impacts on incidents that reflect levels of school violence such as possession of weapons and drugs and occurrences of assaults and fighting? There are methodological reasons to assume that the initial measurement of these incidents will in fact rise because a number of previously unresolved incidents come to light with the introduction of the program. In addition the positive impact of such a program in terms of incidents may not be validly measured until there is some program history developed. Yet despite these difficulties in measurement, it is necessary to track the number of incidents to evaluate the program. Recognition of the associated difficulties with such tracking will place incident numbers gathered by the school system, RCSOP and the Department of Public Instruction in their proper context.

### ***Best Practices***

(4) Finally, what are the "best practices" in terms of program organization and specific policies that will help other communities in developing task forces and, specifically, SRO programs of their

own? What lessons are to be learned from Robeson county, other North Carolina jurisdictions, and throughout the nation in this regard?

### ***The Analysis***

The RCSOP evaluation began in April of 1994 and will continue until April of 1995. The evaluators are in the process of conducting a number of on-site visits with Task Force members, RCSOP participants, resource officers in other communities, and public school officials throughout the state. We are documenting the organizational structure and operations of the RCSOP and SRO programs in other jurisdictions. We are doing so to document organizational design approaches and to determine what organizational design elements enhance chances of success and make replication a possibility.

### ***Organizational Design***

Specifically with reference to RCSOP, we are highlighting the elements of RCSOP's organizational design which constitute elements of a model that, when used and adapted by other communities, could enable them to carry out their own juvenile intervention strategy.

**Workable Tools**

The ultimate intent of the RCSOP evaluation is to create an inventory of "best practices" in the area of preventing school violence which can be translated into a series of workable tools for jurisdictions facing the problem of school violence. These workable tools will be designed for presentation to all interested parties in an effort to facilitate community development in the area of school violence prevention. These tools will include guidelines and requirements for the development of management information systems for monitoring school violence and school violence prevention programs, such as the RCSOP. This will include recommended hardware, software, measurement questions and staff training criteria.

**Tools to Replicate The Model**

The workable tools will also present a replicable methodology for evaluations of school violence prevention programs by schools and criminal justice agencies.

**Conclusion**

Many efforts at reducing school violence are currently being undertaken across North Carolina and the nation. Yet little evaluation of these efforts has been attempted for numerous reasons

ranging from a lack of program history to the methodological difficulties associated with such evaluations. The evaluation strategy for the RCSOP is an attempt at conducting such an evaluation with the intent of turning the "best practices" highlighted in the evaluation into the best policies aimed at preventing school violence.

The bottom line of such an evaluation should be that such policies create a safe and orderly environment for quality education.

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