



# FBI

May 1988

## Law Enforcement Bulletin

111504-  
111508

U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice

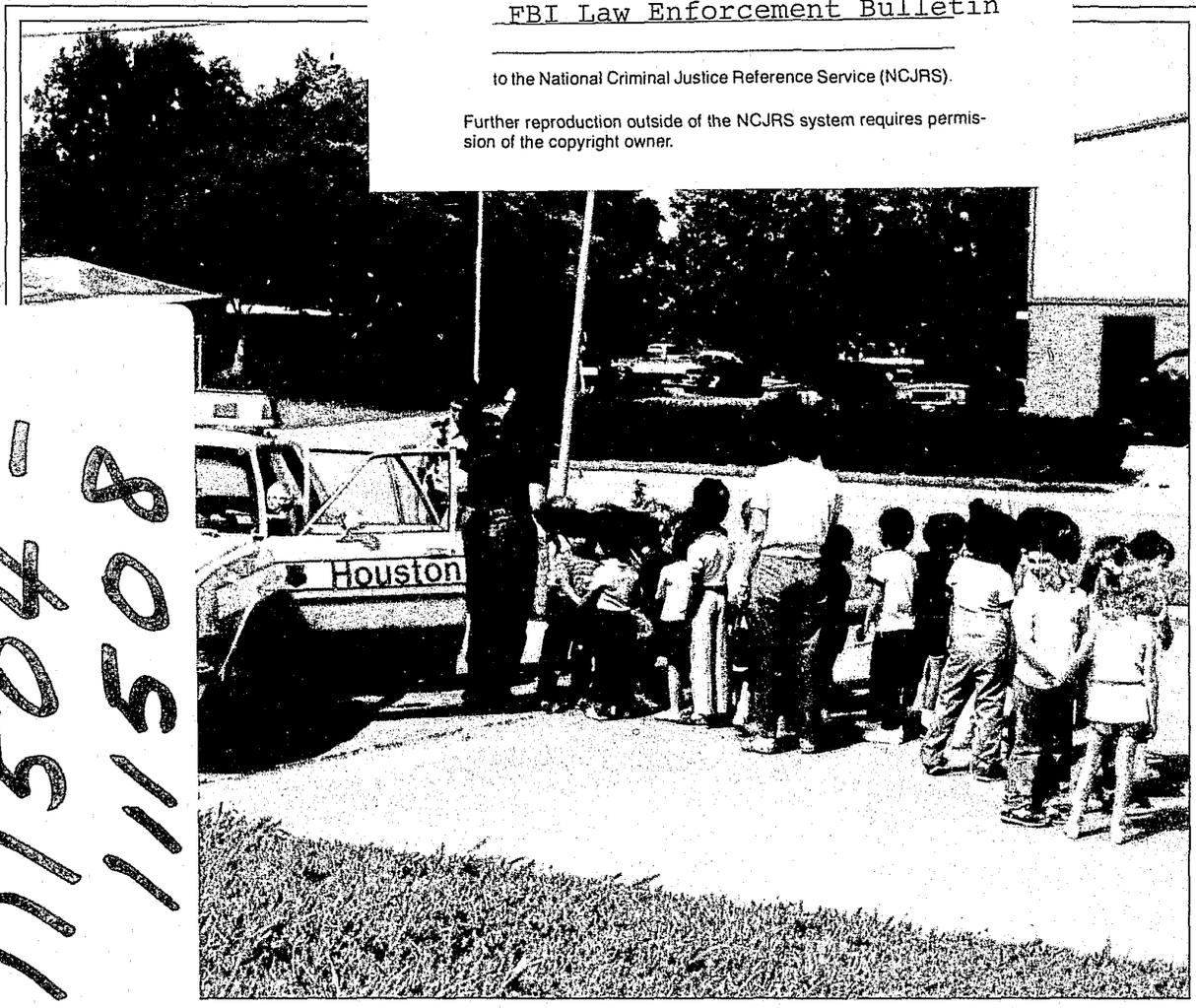
This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

Permission to reproduce this copyrighted material has been granted by

FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the copyright owner.



111504-  
111508

### Taking Aim at Truancy

# Contents

May 1988, Volume 57, Number 5

- Administration 1 **Preparing Written Guidelines** 111504  
By James H. Auten
- Crime Problems 8 **Taking Aim at Truancy** 111505  
JJ By Joe R. Martin, Arnie D. Schulze, and Mike Valdez
- Management 13 **Internal Auditing — An Action Plan for Excellence**  
By Roger C. Viadero 111506
- Training 20 **Inservice Training for Law Enforcement Personnel**  
By Paul M. Smith 111507
- Legal Digest 23 **Legal Issues of Pursuit Driving**  
By Daniel L. Schofield 111508
- 31 **Wanted by the FBI**

# FBI

## Law Enforcement Bulletin

United States Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Washington, DC 20535

William S. Sessions, Director

The Attorney General has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of the Department of Justice. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget through June 6, 1988.

Published by the Office of Congressional and Public Affairs,  
Milt Ahlerich, Assistant Director

Editor—Thomas J. Deakin  
Assistant Editor—Kathryn E. Sulewski  
Art Director—John E. Ott  
Production Manager/Reprints—  
David C. Maynard

### The Cover:

Truancy officers work with all age groups in an effort to promote goodwill throughout the entire school system. (See article p. 8.)

The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (ISSN-0014-5688) is published monthly by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 10th and Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20535. Second-Class postage paid at Washington, DC. Postmaster: Send address changes to Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, Washington, DC 20535.



## *Taking Aim at Truancy*

***"[The School Task Force Program] of the Houston Police Department [combats] juvenile crime by taking aim at truancy and the numerous problems associated with it."***

By  
 SGT. JOE R. MARTIN  
 SGT. ARNIE D. SCHULZE  
 and  
 SGT. MIKE VALDEZ  
*Field Operations Command  
 Police Department  
 Houston, TX*

The problems of juvenile crime and crimes against juveniles are areas that few police departments have been able to address adequately. For the most part, juvenile divisions are tasked with so many responsibilities that they can seldom respond to the concerns of neighborhood schools. This article outlines the efforts of the Houston Police Department to combat juvenile crime by taking aim at truancy and the numerous problems associated with it.

It was hypothesized that a small squad of officers trained and dedicated to the ideals of a safe school campus and surrounding neighborhoods could and would affect the opportunity and occurrence of juvenile-related criminal activity. It was also hoped such a program could affect the number of students dropping out of school every year.

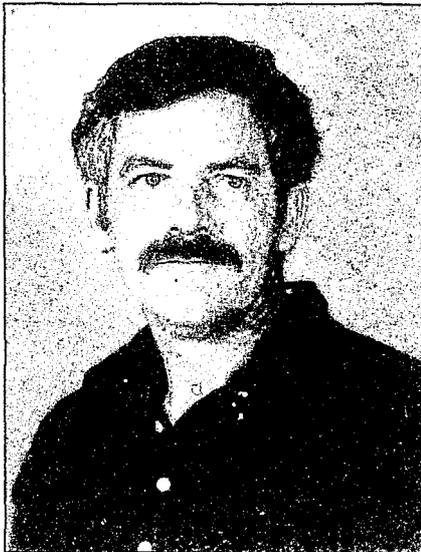
In response to these concerns and ideas, a sergeant working in the North Shepherd Patrol Division was assigned the responsibility of drafting an initial proposal and an operational outline for the creation of a School Task Force Program. To guide the performance of the program, goals were established to:

- 1) Encourage juveniles to remain in a structured environment by making every effort to return truants to the classroom;
- 2) Improve the communications among all agencies working with juveniles, whether their purpose is education, administration, enforcement, or correction;
- 3) Reduce the opportunity for the adult offender to "prey" on the juvenile (encompasses selling of narcotics, sexually graphic materials, inhalants, and alcohol which contribute to the delinquency of juveniles by involving them in criminal activity);
- 4) Facilitate long-term, positive attitude changes in the juvenile community regarding the perception of the role of the police; and
- 5) Reduce the incidents of juvenile-related criminal activity (as a victim or perpetrator), including burglary, assault, rapes, robberies, criminal mischief, auto thefts, and traffic violations.

With these goals as the foundation, the program began on an experimental basis in February 1985.



Sergeant Martin



Sergeant Schulze

Prior to actual implementation, the North Shepherd Patrol Division sergeant met with the director of security for the Houston Independent School District, since the success of the program depended, in part, on the support of the school district's law enforcement personnel. This contact was fruitful in that it established liaison with the security department, whereby officers could discuss the relative merits of the program as well as any unexpected problems that surfaced.

The sergeant also spent a considerable amount of time meeting with the principals and assistant principals of each of the affected schools. Again, at these sessions, the sergeant discussed the basic goals of the program, the responsibilities of the officers, and their relationship to the management activities of the school. Generally, all of the administrators were receptive to the program, with each of them sharing a variety of concerns with the sergeant. Among these concerns were the need to resolve the problems associated with trespassers, various types of disturbances, the temptation offered by game-rooms, handling truants, and conducting apprehensions on campus.

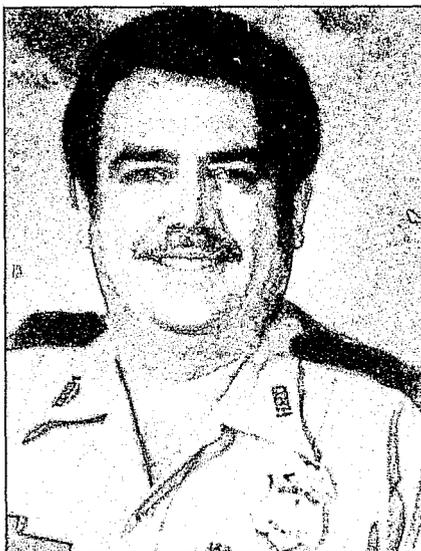
Each assistant principal was designated as the school's liaison to the police department, so that officers responsible for a particular school would know whom to contact in the event they were in need of assistance. With this arrangement, principals could still monitor the activities of task force personnel while actually being relieved of truancy and security problems.

Officially, the experimental program began on February 1, 1985, and

concluded on May 31, 1985. The officers made a total of 1,449 arrests, of which 498 were for truancy. Apprehensions were made for, but were not limited to, the sale and delivery of narcotics, public intoxication, trespassing, disrupting classes, theft, burglary, criminal mischief, resisting arrest, unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, aggravated assault, simple assault, disorderly conduct, arson, and possession of narcotics, alcohol by a minor, narcotics paraphernalia, and weapons. Based on the overall success, a decision was made to expand the program.

The expansion of the School Task Force Program occurred prior to the start of the 1985/1986 school year. Expansion was limited to three additional divisions (the pilot program continued as originally designed). The purpose for not expanding the program throughout the city was twofold. First, since the pilot program was run on an experimental basis, there was some concern over the ability to replicate the program on a large scale. Second, the supporting agencies were not sure they could handle the increased workload. Demands placed upon the Juvenile Division, Harris County Youth Services, Harris County Juvenile Probation, and all of the newly affected schools were sure to put a strain on existing workloads and use of facilities.

The expanded school task force consisted of 27 officers and 4 sergeants. Each of the four divisions had a sergeant and a number of officers assigned to administer the program at targeted schools within their divisional boundaries.



Sergeant Valdez



Chief Brown

The officers assigned to the school task force were volunteers who were selected on the basis of their desire and willingness to participate in the program. Their primary responsibilities were to maintain high visibility in and around the middle schools and high schools.

General responsibilities were developed to identify how officers would spend their time during each tour of duty. In cooperation with school officials and school district security coordinators, officers maintained a proactive patrol on and around the campuses.

Officers would also conduct constant "sweeps" or "roundups" of truants around the schools and handle calls from attendance clerks who provided information on those students who had attendance problems. Particular attention was given to convenience stores, gamerooms, parks, shopping malls, abandoned businesses and/or residences, and wooded areas.

In addition, officers became involved with the students and their parents through the Professional Teacher's Organization and individual counseling sessions when requested. Maintaining high visibility on school campuses provided the students the opportunity to establish rapport with task force squad members and/or beat officers.

Particular attention was also given to businesses that were selling or displaying sexually oriented material to minors or selling narcotics paraphernalia, alcohol, inhalants, and cigarettes to minors. These establishments, including bookstores, gamerooms, convenience stores, etc., disrupted school activities by enticing students off campus which

resulted in students engaging in criminal activities. Officers were also able to enforce violations of occupancy laws, health code violations, and tax stamp violations on video games, pinball machines, and juke boxes within these establishments. The amount of time spent by officers in any one area depended on the existence and frequency of these problems as identified at individual schools.

As a general rule, task force officers perform the same type of tasks irrespective of their assigned station. The officers usually work their assignment in uniform and attend roll call with the regular beat officers. The emphasis on certain tasks varies according to the different types of schools and the socioeconomic makeup of the surrounding neighborhoods. Both the officers and the supervisors of the program realized the program was not just limited to strictly performing enforcement activities. For example, some officers became involved in strengthening their relationships with the students by making presentations in the school and/or attendance at extra-curricular activities, such as student/faculty sports games.

Establishing good rapport with school officials and the students was equally important in that it enhanced the exchange of information beneficial to both parties. Herein lies one of the primary reasons for including this type of responsibility within the concept of neighborhood-oriented policing.

In order to obtain a comprehensive assessment of the expanded program from September 1985, through May 1986, two types of data were collected

---

***“In cooperation with school officials and school district security coordinators, officers maintained a proactive patrol on and around the campuses.”***

---



*Exchanging information with students is a critical responsibility of the task force officers.*

and examined—the results of a pre/post-survey questionnaire and the recorded arrest activity data of the police personnel involved in the program. Both survey questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of 1,000 teachers and administrators before and after the school year began. The pre-survey return rate was 83%, the post-survey return rate was 70%. The results of the survey indicated such relevant perceptions as:

- Program awareness improved among the respondents during the tenure of the program;
- There was a genuine desire on behalf of the respondents to become involved in reducing truancy rates;
- Approximately 50 percent of the respondents believed the truancy

program did not reduce the truancy rate, as recorded through absentee statistics. The police department was unable to obtain absentee statistics, as school district administrators stated they could not provide department personnel with the statistics requested. Therefore, it was impossible to verify the perception of the respondents. However, it should be noted over 3,000 truants were apprehended and returned to the schools during the course of the 1985/1986 school year;

- Respondents felt secure while on school grounds;
- Respondents were of the opinion that most students respected the law. And those who agreed with idea that they could do more to

enhance that respect increased from 77% to 83% between the two rating periods.

- Although the respondents believed the program was a success, the level of success on the post-test measure was lower (80%) than the pre-test measure expectations (93%); and
- Surprisingly, almost half of the respondents indicated a lack of concern regarding the nature of the rapport established between the officers and the students.

Overall, the survey responses were very favorable toward the program. In spite of the initial concern, the receptiveness of school personnel to officer involvement exceeded all expectations. In numerous instances, relationships were mutually supportive to the

---

***"[The School Task Force Program] serves to strengthen community ties with the Houston Police Department which, in turn, improves the perception of safety within the neighborhoods. . . ."***

---

extent school officials considered the task force officers as "their police officers."

A review of the arrest and activity data for the same time period (September 1985, to May 1986) revealed many interesting findings:

- Officers involved in the program worked approximately 30,000 hours, at the cost of \$429,000. It should be noted this cost reflects the officers' normal salaries. Actual additional salary expenditures came to only \$1,300 for overtime;
- During this period, a total of 17,633 activities were conducted by the officers, resulting in 8,360 arrests, stemming from the handling of over 4,500 juveniles; and
- A total of 1,038 misdemeanors and 144 felony arrests were recorded by the officers; yet, of the Part I crimes, only minor reductions were found in 18% of the beats for burglaries and 21% of the beats for thefts.

There was a consensus among the task force sergeants that the program did not have a significant impact on reducing overall reported Part I criminal offenses. Despite the fact that a total of 3,774 truant apprehensions were made, the reported Part I crime rates remained constant when compared to statistics from the same time period and the same area prior to program implementation. The perception that juveniles were primarily responsible for a large portion of the criminal activity has become highly questionable, particularly during school hours when the task

force operated. Because the number of schools far exceeded the number of officers available for intensified service, it became impossible for an adequate number of apprehensions to be made. This suggests that a higher concentration of officers could result in a larger number of juvenile apprehensions, with the resulting impact on the crime rate. Despite not being able to significantly reduce felony and misdemeanor criminal activity in the targeted areas, the officers uncovered a wide range of activities requiring their attention which, heretofore, went unreported.

A number of recommendations were made concerning citywide expansion of the program. These included deploying personnel on the basis of student-to-officer ratios, separating the duties of task force officers from other types of duties, increasing the availability of equipment, and standardizing apprehension and detection procedures. With the majority of these recommendations accepted, the school task force was expanded to provide service to the entire City of Houston.

The degree of success of the program must be viewed from several different aspects. The number of juvenile-related apprehensions substantially exceeded the juvenile arrest figures attained prior to implementation of the program. Although there were not significant decreases in any of the major crime categories that could be correlated to the program, there were *some* decreases. The areas targeted for the program experienced no significant increase in Part I crimes. Police visibility has been enhanced. Officer/student relationships are no longer just antagonistic; friendships have been formed.

Once the program had become well-established in the targeted schools, the problems created by disreputable businesses in and around the school decreased through the use of more effective law enforcement tactics. Calls for service increased, primarily due to school administrators, teachers, and parents discovering that the task force officers could provide a wealth of services to them. The task force officers are now being called on to assist in counseling sessions, to share information about different programs, and to resolve a multitude of other police-related problems.

Through their dedication, the officers have established a reputation of caring for what happens to the students, which is frequently reciprocated by the students. Students and teachers now feel safer while at the schools, and officers have been told parents now have more confidence in the safety of the school campus.

Incidents regarding adult offenders' involvement with students now receive an immediate, thorough investigation, frequently resulting in arrests. From the aspect of the increased real and perceived safety of the students, plus all of the other noted benefits, the program is regarded as a resounding success by the participating officers and supervisors. It serves as an educational tool for school administrators, the parents, and the students. It also serves to strengthen community ties with the Houston Police Department which, in turn, improves the perception of safety within the neighborhoods throughout the City of Houston. **FBI**