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School Safety



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School Safety

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About the cover:

This statue in front of the Philadelphia Police Administration Building exemplifies the positive relationship needed between law enforcers and youth. Photograph by Greg Lanier.

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one who entered was asked to "sign-in" and was then directed to the principal's office. No real screening took place at the front desk and there was no assurance that the visitor, if he had other plans, would go to the office. Once, instead of signing my name, I wrote "child molester" in a school's log book and was allowed entry.

In the last year, there has been some progress. But problems still exist.

For example, for obvious reasons, school exits (other than the main door) are supposed to be locked to the outside but operable from the inside by pushing the "panic bar." Many of these doors do not always close and lock properly. And those locks that are not broken can be blocked so that anyone who wishes can get back in the building without going back to the main entrance.

We cannot allow elementary school staff and students to be crime targets. Rigorous application of the following procedures will reduce their vulnerability:

- Doors which are not locked should be monitored.
- Signs should be placed throughout the building stating "For the Safety of Our Children, Please Leave by the Main Entrance." Exit door locks, used less frequently, are more likely to remain reliable.
- For the same reason, out-of-the-way exits should be designated "Emergency Exit Only."
- There should be several exit inspections during the school day - certainly after the students enter in the morning and after they return from lunch.
- Schools with high incident rates should have "annunciator" systems which electronically inform the central office whenever an exit door is opened.
- Staff who act as guards or receptionists at the front desk should be trained to establish the identity of visitors and the nature of their business in the school.
- Parents should not be allowed to in-

trude on class-time for conferences with teachers.

- Parent-teacher conferences should be held in or near administrative offices.
- Intercom phones or a two-way "talk back" public address system should be available in every classroom and office.
- An intruder alert procedure should involve notification of staff through a coded announcement (so as not to alarm the children) and a response designated to flush the intruder from the building. We do not generally advise apprehension of intruders. This should be left to the police.

We also advise staff and children not to wear expensive looking jewelry or carry large amounts of cash. We tell them to come to school with others and leave with others - the herd instinct is useful.

While we try to make the school less vulnerable, we encourage every member of the elementary school community to keep their "street smarts" even while in school. □

School/law enforcement programs that work

Today's educators and law enforcers increasingly recognize that only through joint programs and shared resources can they prevent and respond to the difficult conditions facing schools in this decade. Following are examples of cooperative school/law enforcement programs from around the country.

El Dorado, Arkansas - The El Dorado Police Department expects to swear in 3,000 new officers during the 1986-87 school year. They will be junior law enforcement officers, recruited from local schools as part of the new Anti-Drug Abuse Conditioning program. This special law enforcement/school project gives young students a positive introduction to local police, discourages experimentation with drugs and pro-

motes peer pressure to abide by the law. Junior LEOs are required to complete an anti-drug abuse workbook, write about what they have learned, memorize the police department telephone number, and give a thumbs-up sign to every police officer they see in the community.

Port Washington, New York - When budget problems forced reassignment of officers from foot to motor patrols, the local police chief felt it might reduce communication between police and the area's citizens, particularly its young people. As a preventive step, the Police-School Resource Officer Program was initiated to improve student understanding of police objectives and methods. Eight unarmed, hand-picked officers were assigned to visit the local high school once or twice a week and be available to students on their own "turf."

Students soon realized the officers

were not on campus to make arrests or gather crime data, and the officers were accepted into the school community. Students conversed with SROs in the halls, and the officers were asked to visit classrooms and make presentations. This program has improved communication and understanding between students and police and has been expanded to include the elementary and junior high schools.

South San Francisco, California - If you want to know what gang members do away from school, find where they hang out, and hang out with them. This is an important part of the South San Francisco Police/School Liaison Program. Officers participating in the program, which began in the 1981-82 school year, also maximize their time on elementary, junior and senior high school campuses to develop rapport with students, teachers, administrators and support groups, such as