

NEWS



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 6, 2004

City of Philadelphia Launches Operation Safe Schools

PHILADELPHIA – Operation Safe Schools, the new security initiative being introduced by Mayor John F. Street, the Philadelphia School District and the Police Department, was launched today to help combat juvenile violence in and around school buildings.

The primary objective of Operation Safe Schools is to collect information that can lead to intervention and, therefore, the prevention of violence in order to keep children and communities safer.

“Nothing is more important than the safety of our children,” Mayor Street said. “Our goal with Operation Safe Schools is to prevent serious, or even fatal, incidents and the key ingredient to this prevention strategy is getting good information early enough to stop the violence before it occurs.”

The new initiative is a collaborative effort to help gather timely information, and then act on it before a crisis strikes. The operation will mobilize a battery of dedicated resources that are necessary to help combat youth violence in and around Philadelphia schools – public, charter and private.

“Overall violent incidents are down in the Scholl District of Philadelphia, but recent high profile acts against our students remind us that there is still much to do, said James Nevels, Chairman of the School Reform Commission. “I thank Mayor Street for proposing Operation Safe Schools, because it not only builds on our current programs, but will go a long way in reducing youth violence wherever it may occur throughout the entire city.”

The main strategy of Operation Safe Schools is communication and follow-up. The program consists of a special new component, the Juvenile Violence Intelligence Unit, which will focus on safety in and around schools. The core intelligence unit will comprise five Philadelphia police officers, two school district police

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officers, two Philadelphia Housing Authority officers and two staff members from Town Watch Integrated Services. Forty police officers will also be deployable at a moment's notice to assist with violent flare-ups near school buildings. School district police personnel will also receive special training.

"I thank Mayor Street for creating the Operation Safe Schools initiative, and encourage all of our community partners and organizations to join the City in making Philadelphia a safer place," said Paul Vallas, CEO of the School District of Philadelphia.

Utilizing an existing 24-hour school district hotline, 215-299-SAFE, students, school employees, parents and community members will also play a key role in assisting various city and neighborhood agencies collect data that will alert law enforcement and other support agencies to imminently dangerous situations.

Lt. Danny McCann, a 28-year veteran last assigned to the city's counter-terrorism unit, will supervise the new unit. The unit will be housed and share resources with other special intelligence operations in the Police Department. The unit staff will be responsible for receiving, disseminating and tracking all relevant information and serve as a central point of contact for school district security and other police officers who have school-related information. An interactive database will support the prevention/intervention work of the operation.

"We're doing something now that is pro-active to prevent any further incidents from happening inside or outside of schools," Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson said. "It's a holistic-type approach, including school police, Philadelphia police, the Managing Director's Office, Juvenile Probation and 25 or 30 other organizations. We want to make sure that children are safe inside and outside of schools. And although it's called Operation Safe Schools, it's an approach to end violence among youths anywhere in this city, anytime of day."

The effectiveness of this comprehensive approach will hinge on thorough intelligence gathering and data analysis and the proper dissemination of that information to law-enforcement personnel and others who are trained to intervene. Information will come primarily from school and neighborhood-based "tips" to the 24-hour hotline, as well as from non-confidential information collected by city agencies and service providers about known situations involving students and the community.

Operation Safe Schools builds on efforts currently in place to protect our children and our communities. Philadelphia already delivers a series of law enforcement, prevention and intervention services aimed at keeping children and neighborhoods safe. For example, the Heads Up Drug Prevention Program, GRRIP (Gun Recovery Reward Information Program), and the Youth Violence Reduction Program have all been successful in curtailing juvenile violence, lessening crime and promoting a better quality of life for everyone in this city.

Other examples of existing intervention and prevention initiatives include:

- One police officer on daily patrol outside every public high school
- Police coverage at every public middle and high school during arrival and dismissal
- School police participating with city police in weekly COMPSTAT community crime analysis meetings
- Regular communication between school principals and police district captains
- School-based juvenile probation officers covering 15 public high schools

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- Police officers and community agencies providing a myriad of anti-drug and anti-violence programs, including D.A.R.E., to children and teens in schools, recreation centers and other community sites around the city
- A \$69 million annual investment in after school and youth development programs that are keeping more than 30,000 kids safe and productive during non-school hours.

Operation Safe Schools is the newest addition to the arsenal.

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