

U.S. Department of Justice  
Community Relations Service

# SCHOOL DISRUPTIONS

TIPS FOR EDUCATORS  
AND POLICE

*Revised 1998*

The original project resulted from a conference sponsored by the Community Relations Service in the late 1970's, which was supported by a grant from the National Institute of Education. This publication is a 1998 revision of the original publication.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the participants and consultants and do not necessarily represent the official position or policy of the sponsoring agencies.

This brochure has two sections:

**Preventing Disruptions and Responding to Disruptions.**

Following a few introductory remarks, each section is divided into two parts:

**What Schools Should Do**

**What Police Should Do**

This brochure outlines a minimum number of basic steps that school and police officials should take in developing a joint approach to problems of school disruption. It may also be used as a resource book of checklists in preparing a memorandum of agreement relating to school disruption.

# School Disruptions:

TIPS FOR EDUCATORS  
AND POLICE

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*As public-sanctioned  
school and police  
officials, you share  
an awesome  
responsibility for  
preventing - as well as  
dealing with -possible  
school disruption.*

# **SCHOOL DISRUPTIONS REVISION**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since publication of the original **School Disruptions** brochure in the late 1970's, school systems nationwide have experienced major changes in the make up of their communities in both the number and the variety of cultures and languages. The influx of immigrant groups with their different cultures, languages, and life experiences has challenged existing resources. With these demographic changes, there has been an escalation of community tension that has carried into our schools.

It is rewarding to find that many of the recommendations contained in the original brochure on school disruptions remain relevant to this day. This 1998 revision will make this guidance more useful to schools and law enforcement organizations in our increasingly diverse Nation.

## **PREVENTING DISRUPTIONS**

While creating safe school environments is a community-wide responsibility, preventing disruptions in the schools is the primary responsibility of school and police officials.

School authorities bear the most immediate responsibility for identifying potential school problems. However, only through cooperative planning and open communications can all the conditions that breed school disruptions be analyzed.

This cooperative effort must have one clear purpose: to provide a safe and secure environment in which students may learn to the maximum of their abilities. This must remain the primary purpose, even when racially inflammatory conditions prevail.

Too often, officials facing school problems feel there is nothing they can do immediately to resolve the situation. They see themselves with very limited options. In many cases, school closings are ordered unnecessarily. Good planning which examined other alternatives could have kept the schools open.

Effective planning begins with a realistic assessment of needs. School officials must be prepared to deal with more than just the school's narrowly defined security problems. Community concerns and issues also affect the school's situation.

Needs assessment should be a joint effort. Both the schools and police must conduct studies and share their results. After these initial steps are completed, a better understanding of what the real problems are and who should take the necessary action under specific circumstances will result.

Included in the first section of this booklet are common elements for developing a joint approach to preventing disruption.

This section has three parts:

- Conducting a Needs Assessment
- Developing Joint Preventive Measures, and
- Planning for Disruptions.

# **CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

## **WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO**

### **Collect Data**

Conduct special surveys; examine faculty staffing patterns; and review school policies.

Review school security incident reports.

Evaluate curriculum and social issues affecting the student body; review student involvement in developing policies and programs; and examine student opportunities for participating in activities.

Review changing demographics of the student population and languages spoken.

Review current educational research findings on school disruptions and violence.

Share security information with police. If a school security program exists, it should provide liaison between the principal and the police.

### **Identify Problems**

What are your most serious problems? Have the real causes been identified or addressed?

Of these serious problems, which demand your immediate attention?

Are the problems school-centered, community-centered, or some distinctive combination?

### **Identify Needs and Set Goals**

Request police opinion of what your needs are to prevent disruption.

Based on available data, determine needs and set goals.

Put goals into priorities.

## **CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

### **WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO**

#### **Collect Data:**

Analyze school-related crime information.

Review other law enforcement research findings related to school disruptions and violence

Review police/school incident reports.

Analyze school/community problems and incidents which may spark disruption; and pay attention to conflicts between ethnic groups.

Make appropriate case and intelligence information available to school authorities.

#### **Identify Problems**

What problems are likely to require immediate police response? What liaison with the school is needed?

What problems require police participation in long-range solutions?

What is the proper police role in dealing with school-centered and community-centered problems which may lead to school disruption?

#### **Identify Needs and Set Goals**

Request school opinion of what you should do to help prevent disruption.

Based on available data, determine needs and set goals.

Put goals into priorities.

# **CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

## **WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO**

### **Collect Data:**

Analyze school-related crime information.

Review other law enforcement research findings related to school disruptions and violence

Review police/school incident reports.

Analyze school/community problems and incidents which may spark disruption; and pay attention to conflicts between ethnic groups.

Make appropriate case and intelligence information available to school authorities.

### **Identify Problems**

What problems are likely to require immediate police response? What liaison with the school is needed?

What problems require police participation in long-range solutions?

What is the proper police role in dealing with school-centered and community-centered problems which may lead to school disruption?

### **Identify Needs and Set Goals**

Request school opinion of what you should do to help prevent disruption.

Based on available data, determine needs and set goals.

Put goals into priorities.

# **CONDUCTING NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

## **WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO**

### **Develop and Implement Solutions to Meet Goals:**

Do you have adequate resources within the community?

Are you making full use of community resources? Has a community advisory council been established?

Are Federal, State, foundation, or corporate grants available to assist with the problem?

Have timetables been established for solutions?

Have responsibility and authority for developing solutions been clearly defined or delegated?

Have responsibility and authority for school-police cooperation been defined and accepted within the administration and between the police and administration?

### **Re-evaluation**

Re-evaluate problems and goals after an appropriate period of time.

Modify existing solutions if necessary.

Develop new solutions if appropriate.

# CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO

### **Develop and Implement Solutions to Meet Goals:**

What police resources are available for use for school problems?

What special demands on police manpower and budgeting will cooperation with schools create?

How can these demands be met?

Are Federal, State, foundation, or corporate grants available to help meet the demands?

Have timetables been established to guide a joint police/school effort?

Have responsibility and authority for police-school cooperation been defined and accepted within the department and between the school and the department?

### **Re-evaluation**

Re-evaluate problems and goals after an appropriate period of time.

Modify existing solutions if necessary.

Develop new solutions if appropriate.

## **DEVELOPING JOINT PREVENTIVE MEASURES**

### **WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO**

Assure that your preventive measures reflect your real needs. Are you addressing the problems or symptoms?

Develop a fair code of discipline and a student Bill of Rights. Involve students, parents, and staff in the development process. The policies and codes should include a zero tolerance for firearms and other dangerous weapons on school campuses.

Develop a realistic grievance procedure. Again, involve students, parents, and staff in the development process.

Put into place various activities involving students in the early identification of potential problem areas and development of remedial steps.

Review staffing patterns so that they reflect the community and student body.

Review your curriculum to see that it reflects not only educational standards but also community, ethnic, and student concerns.

Organize student conflict resolution teams to resolve minor conflicts before they escalate to more serious problems.

Assure yourself that the staff of the security unit, should one exist, is capable of recognizing potential problems and is able to deal with students without causing undue antagonism.

Develop open lines of communication with the police and community groups. Establish rumor control and verification centers. If a school security office exists, it should take the lead in police relations. However, final responsibility always rests with the school system superintendent.

Develop liaison with individuals/community groups that work with each major ethnic group.

Consider the creation of a school security unit for defined needs and purposes if your school has no internal security team.

## **DEVELOPING JOINT PREVENTIVE MEASURES**

### **WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO**

Assure that preventive measures reflect your real needs. Are you addressing the problems or symptoms?

Develop a School Liaison Resource Officer Program in schools where no security unit exists. The head of this program should be actively involved in teaching and curriculum development, as well as in student counseling.

Use officer assignments to develop rapport with Students. Consult with school officials to use police experts as panelists and speakers in school seminars.

Key patrol patterns to critical times and locations relating to schools.

Develop formal policies and processes for supporting school security.

Open lines of communication with the schools, the juvenile court, and community groups.

Assure that liaisons exists with new racial/cultural groups.

Clarify legal issues relating to police participation in normal school processes.

Provide school officials with examples (and training if necessary) of circumstances and incidents which must be reported to police even when there is no major disruption.

# PLANNING FOR DISRUPTIONS

## WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO

### **Identify potential problem sites:**

- Internal: exits, restrooms, gyms, cafeteria, shops, and boiler rooms.
- External: bus zones, commons, parking areas, adjacent property, and athletic fields.

List available resource people who could respond quickly to the above sites.

Include school security, teaching and non-teaching staff, traditional and non-traditional student leaders, parents, community representatives, and police.

Specify tasks for each resource person and develop a communication network to the central command post.

- Clearly define chain of command for both school and police officials.
- Initiate a program of presenting critical information to school and police officials.

### **Other considerations:**

- Provide separate and joint in-service training for police, school personnel, and community liaisons on skills and techniques for responding to school disruption. This training should include crisis response simulations.
- Give school staff and community liaisons clear operational instructions.
- Establish a signal system for announcing an emergency and its termination.

# **PLANNING FOR DISRUPTIONS**

## **WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO**

### **Identify potential problem sites and times:**

- Sites: bus routes, transfer points, youth hangouts, and parking lots.
- Time: beginning of school, lunchtime, and end of classes.

### **Outline available police resources:**

- Establish patrol patterns to coincide with problem sites and times.
- Plan for traffic and crowd control.
- Clearly define chain of command for police, school officials, and community liaisons.
- Notify, back-up and neighboring police stations/ departments of your location and situation.
- Initiate a program of presenting critical information to police, school officials, and community liaisons.

### **Other considerations:**

- Develop a plan for phased intervention and withdrawal.
- Identify a school liaison officer or assign a school resource officer.
- Establish a coordinated media policy with the school and community liaisons.
- Familiarize liaison personnel with the school command post and, if possible, rehearse procedures for handling emergency problems.
- Develop a community justice program.

# PLANNING FOR DISRUPTIONS

## WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO

### **Other considerations (continued):**

- Have an emergency list of telephone numbers available.
- Establish a central command post.
- Develop a way of assisting injured people.
- Develop a method of isolating and removing disruptive students from school premises.
- Develop ways of communicating quickly with parents and community groups.
- Establish a written reporting process to be used in disruptive situations.
- Develop a coordinated media policy in cooperation with police and community liaison.
- Advise police of any special problem for schools created by the police plan.
- Determine the role of student conflict-resolution teams and provide appropriate training.

Review, update, and reissue school/police plans. Develop a procedure requiring annual review and update of all the foregoing. Reissue revised plans to all involved personnel.

# PLANNING FOR DISRUPTIONS

## WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO

### **Other considerations (continued):**

- Provide separate and joint in-service training for police, community liaison, and school personnel on skills and techniques for dealing with school disruption.

Review, update, and reissue school/police plans. Develop a procedure requiring annual review and update of all the foregoing. Reissue revised plans to all involved personnel.

*If a school racial  
disruption occurs,  
the first responsibility  
is to protect life and  
return to  
a normal educational  
setting as soon as  
possible.*

## RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIONS

Even with well thought-out prevention plans, disruptions may occur. This responsibility is equally shared by both the school and police with help from parents and the community.

The best way to assure an orderly, effective response to disruption is through cooperative preplanning and pre-established positive relationships with parents and community liaisons. Police, school personnel, and community liaisons are dependent upon each other in this process. Each should know what to expect from the other. A major lesson from CRS experience with school disruption response efforts is that community liaisons have been underutilized to allay parental concerns and escalating community tensions stemming from misinformation. Lingering misinformation serves to catalyze anger and exacerbates the potential for escalation of the existing disturbance.

Positive relationships can be established best by designing a written contingency plan between schools and law enforcement through a memorandum of agreement or understanding. "There should be no surprises when responding to a disruption.

Whether or not such formal arrangements exist, there are certain minimum steps that must be considered when responding to a school disruption. The following section outlines these steps.

This section has three parts:

- Using School and Community Resources
- Requesting Police Intervention, and
- Managing Police Intervention.

# **USING SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

## **WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO**

Respond to a disruption according to its level of intensity. Generally, there are three levels of intensity which should be discussed and agreed to with the police.

### **Level 1 - When disruption is confined to one area and there is no threat to students or staff.**

School officials are better off dealing with this situation internally. Avoid the complications that may arise with the massive use of outside resources.

If a school security program exists, involve it immediately. If necessary, bring in supplementary school professionals to help stabilize the school and manage the short-term overload of demands on school administration.

Consider deployment of student conflict-resolution teams for outreach to student population.

The overall policy in these situations should be containment and removal, with minimum interruption of the educational processes.

## **USING SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

### **WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO**

Respond to a disruption according to its level of intensity. Generally, there are three levels of intensity which should be discussed and agreed to with school officials:

#### **Level I - When disruption is confined to one area and there is no threat to students and staff.**

In these situations, the immediate police commander should be thoroughly briefed on what is happening. Where a school security program exists, the best liaison is usually between the intelligence unit and a designated school security officer.

Appropriate internal alert procedures should be designed to deal with the crisis should it intensify.

The overall policy in these situations is containment and removal with minimum interruption of the educational processes.

# **USING SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

## **WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO**

**Level 2 - When disruptive forces are able to move freely around the school campus and/or pose a direct threat to members of the school community.**

School security officers with appropriate legal status should apprehend disrupters and end disruption. In the absence of such security officers, police assistance should be requested to control and remove disrupters.

If necessary, bring in supplementary school professionals to help manage school administration during the difficulties. Also, bring in previously selected and trained community representatives to assist in the stabilization effort. Make sure that language and cultural requirements of student body are met.

Finally, activate the school's community advisory council if one exists. Above all, make every effort to keep the school open.

**Level 3 - When disruption is general, educational processes have ended for most students, and there are serious threats to students and staff. In short, the situation is out of control and cannot be controlled by school personnel alone.**

Immediately, request police assistance according to pre-existing plans. Generally, the school should be closed. When violations of the law are involved, authority to end disruption should shift from the school administrators to the police officer in charge of the police response.

However, responsibility for the school should remain in the hands of the school administrators. School officials should cooperate with the police in a phased plan for restoring normal school operations.

# USING SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

## WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO

**Level 2 - When disruptive forces are able to move freely around the school campus and/or pose a direct threat to members of the school community.**

Institute a Level 2 alert for the school. Prepare a designated response unit to assist the school if *necessary*.

*If assistance is requested, respond with the minimum number of police required. Try to draw as little attention to yourselves as possible.*

In collaboration with school authorities, apprehend disrupters and assist school in filing appropriate charges. Make use of community liaisons, if necessary, to reduce the potential of misinformation inflaming community tensions.

*Get out of the school as soon as possible.*

**Level 3 - When disruption is general, educational processes have ended for most students, and there are serious threats to students and staff. In short, the situation is out of control and cannot be controlled by school personnel alone.**

Institute a Level 3 alert for the school and respond according to plans for dealing with a major disruption.

Apprehend disrupters, end disruption, and remain at the school as long as needed to provide deterrence and security.

*Return all security functions to school personnel as quickly as possible.*

# **REQUESTING POLICE INTERVENTION**

## **WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO**

Who calls the police?

- Only one or two individuals in the school should have the authority to call the police. If a school security office exists, its director and the school principal should be the only authorized callers. These individuals should be identified to the police.
- Provide a "call-back" number so that the police can verify the call as legitimate.

Who will be in charge?

- The principal or authorized designee remains in charge of school premises and personnel.
- The police will have primary responsibility for the enforcement of the law and will insist on making the final decision on all matters involving their sworn obligations. (School officials retain a responsibility to support the police as appropriate.)

## **REQUESTING POLICE INTERVENTION**

### **WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO**

#### **To whom do the police respond?**

- Identify one place, person, or office to receive official calls from the schools.
- Only respond to previously identified individuals.
- Verify the call as legitimate via the "call-back" number.

#### **Who will be in charge?**

- The senior officer on the scene is normally in charge of police.
- The officer in charge should immediately establish personal contact with the individual in charge of the school.

# **MANAGING POLICE INTERVENTION**

## **WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO**

### **Establish and maintain two-way communications; work together:**

- Those in charge must know what their counterparts in the police department are doing and why.

### **Control and predefine responses:**

- There should be a phased sequence of actions following the written memorandum of agreement.

### **Assure that levels of police response are dictated by the level of school disruption:**

- Top school officials must determine the seriousness of the school's problem with input from police officials. School officials must also insure that the schools are
- prepared to assist and provide input to the police in each level.

### **Provide police withdrawal assistance:**

- When to withdraw requires the cooperative agreement of both police and school officials.
- There may be pressures to leave the police in too long or move them out too soon. These pressures must be resisted.

# **MANAGING POLICE INTERVENTION**

## **WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO**

### **Establish and maintain two-way communications; work together:**

- Those in charge must know what their counterparts in the schools are doing and why.

### **Control and pre-define responses:**

- There should be a phased sequence of actions following the written memorandum of agreement.

### **Dictate levels of police response based on the level of school disruption:**

- With assistance and guidance from the police, the principal will determine the seriousness of the school's problem.

### **Plan and execute phases:**

- Request for police assistance by school.
- Verify request and initiate assessment of situation.
- Determine an appropriate amount of response and necessary time elements.
- Dispatch first police squads, if necessary.
- Send main police force to staging area.
- Send support unit to staging area.
- Intervene by force if necessary.
- Withdraw police as soon as possible.

**MANAGING POLICE  
INTERVENTION**

**WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO**

# **MANAGING POLICE INTERVENTION**

## **WHAT POLICE SHOULD DO**

### **Assure timely police withdrawal:**

- When to withdraw requires careful judgment made cooperatively by both police and school officials.
- There may be pressures to leave police in too long or take them out too soon, Withdrawal must be consistent with the safety of students and staff regardless of how the decision is reached.
- The final decision to withdraw is the responsibility of the police officer in charge. He or she should consider at least the following:

Has the crisis peaked?

What is the school's estimate of the situation?

Is the disruption affecting the surrounding community?

What are the minimum force levels which may be needed to keep the school open?

In what condition are the assigned police officers?

Are there other police forces involved? What are their conditions?

Are police officers needed elsewhere?

## **ABOUT THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS SERVICE**

The Community Relations Service (CRS), an arm of the U.S. Department of Justice, is a specialized Federal conciliation service available to State and local officials to help resolve and prevent racial and ethnic conflict, violence and civil disorder. When governors, mayors, police chiefs, and school superintendents need help to defuse racial or ethnic crises, they turn to CRS. CRS helps local officials and residents tailor locally defined resolutions when conflict and violence threaten community stability and wellbeing. Created by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, CRS is the only Federal Agency dedicated to preventing and resolving racial and ethnic tensions, incidents, and civil disorders. It assists State and local units of government, private and public organizations, and community groups in restoring community racial stability and harmony.

## **CRS OFFICES**

CRS conciliation, prevention, and technical assistance services are available through Regional and Field Offices

### **Regional Offices**

Region I (New England)  
(ME, VT, NH, MA, CT, RI)  
99 Summer Street, Suite 1820  
Boston, MA 02110  
617/424-5715  
617/424-5727 (FAX)

Region II (Northeast)  
(NY, NJ, VI, PR)  
26 Federal Plaza, Suite 36-118  
New York, NY 10278  
212/264-0700  
212/264-2143 (FAX)

Region III (Mid-Atlantic)  
(DC, DE, MD, PA, VA, WV)  
2nd and Chestnut Streets, Suite 208  
Philadelphia, PA 19106  
215/597-2344  
215/597-9148 (FAX)

Region IV (Southeast)  
(AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN)  
75 Piedmont Ave, NE, Suite 900  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
404/331-6883  
404/331-4471 (FAX)

Region V (Midwest)  
(IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI)  
55 West Monroe Street, Suite 420  
Chicago, IL 60603  
312/353-4391  
312/353-4390 (FAX)

Region VI (Southwest)  
(AR, LA, NM, OK, TX)  
1420 West Mockingbird Lane, Suite 250  
Dallas, TX 75247  
214/655-8175  
214/655-8184 (FAX)

Region VII (Central)  
(IA, KS, MO, NE)  
I 100 Main Street, Suite 320  
Kansas City, MO 64105-2112  
816/426-7434  
816/426-7441 (FAX)

Region VIII (Rocky Mountain)  
(CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY)  
1244 Speer Blvd., Suite 650  
Denver, CO 80204-3584  
303/844-2973  
303/844-2907 (FAX)

Region IX (Western)  
(AZ, CA, GU, HI, NV)  
120 Howard Street, Suite 790  
San Francisco, CA 94105  
415/744-6565  
415/744-6590 (FAX)

Region X (Northwest)  
(AK, ID, OR, WA)  
915 Second Street, Suite 1808  
Seattle, WA 98174  
206/220-6700  
206/220-6706 (FAX)

### **Field Offices**

Community Relations Service  
51 SW First Ave, Suite 424  
Miami, FL 33130  
305/536-5206  
305/536-7363 (FAX)

**Field Offices** *(continued)*

*Community Relations Service*  
211 West Fort Street, Suite 1404  
Detroit, MI 48226  
313/226-4010  
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*Community Relations Service*  
515 Rusk Avenue, Suite 12605  
Houston, TX 77002  
713/718-4861  
713/718-4862 (FAX)

*Community Relations Service*  
888 South Figueroa Street, Suite 1880  
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# CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

## Community Relations Service

Our goal is to provide sensitive and effective conflict prevention and resolution services. CRS will meet the following standards:

- We will clearly explain the process that CRS uses to address racial and ethnic conflicts and our role in that process.
- We will provide opportunities for all parties involved to contribute to and work toward a solution to the racial or ethnic conflict.
- If you are a participant in a CRS training session or conference, you will receive timely and useful information and materials that will assist you in preventing or minimizing racial and ethnic tensions.
- We will be prepared to provide on-site services in major racial or ethnic crisis situations within 24 hours from the time when your community notifies CRS or CRS becomes aware of the crisis.
- In non-crisis situations we will contact you to discuss our services within three days of when your community notifies CRS or when CRS becomes aware of the situation.