

DATE ISSUED: November 12, 2002

REPORT NO. 02-268

ATTENTION: Honorable Mayor and City Council

SUBJECT: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SAFETY PROGRAM

SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE CITY COUNCIL.

BACKGROUND

The San Diego Police Department provides a variety of police services to elementary schools in San Diego. Juvenile Services Team officers respond to calls for service, facilitate the School Safety Patrol Program, and teach safety and drug, alcohol, and tobacco awareness and prevention.

In the summer of 1999, a committee formed to evaluate the curriculum for Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) and the Department's presentation of the curriculum. At that time, officers taught the D.A.R.E curriculum to fifth grade students in approximately 80 schools. Law enforcement officials, school administrators, youth services providers, youth counselors, and parents comprised the committee.

The committee concluded that the D.A.R.E. curriculum was outdated and that the Department's presentation of the curriculum was ineffective. The curriculum, written in 1985, had not been revised since 1992. In addition, after the San Diego Unified School District ("the District") implemented its "Blueprint for Student Success" in 1999, the D.A.R.E. curriculum no longer met the District's literacy mandate. This mandate directs all elementary school grades to provide literacy instruction in the first three hours of the school day. Furthermore, D.A.R.E. America recommends that for the program to be truly effective, it must be taught sequentially in elementary, middle, and high school formats. However, staffing permitted the Department to teach only the fifth grade curriculum. As a result, a limited number of students had the

opportunity to interact positively with officers in the classroom and learn about preventing substance abuse.

In September 1999, the Department partnered with the District to teach the Life Skills program. Life Skills provided training on preventing tobacco use, decision-making, and self-esteem. Life Skills was designed for middle school grades but was taught in the fifth grade. This program was piloted for one year in the following 15 elementary schools in four area commands:

Central Div.	Western Div.	Southern Div.	Northern Div.
Brooklyn	Birney	Nester	Field
Kimbrough	Florence	Jurarez/Lincoln	Lafayette
Washington	Garfield		Lindbergh/Schweitzer
	Jefferson		Sequoia
	McKinley		
	Northpark		

Juvenile Services Team officers, trained by District personnel over two days, taught the Life Skills program. During the pilot, officers, teachers, and District administrators met monthly to discuss the program and to adjust it when necessary. After the one-year pilot, the District and the Department concluded that Life Skills lessons were too complex for fifth graders, and that the program was not a viable replacement for D.A.R.E.

In August 2000, members of the Department and the District met to discuss the inadequacy of Life Skills at the elementary school level. Given the Department's talent and experience in juvenile safety, the group decided that the Department would create a comprehensive school safety program for all elementary school grades that would meet the needs of the District, the Department, and the community. This program would address safety issues for children *in addition* to topics the DARE program covered. The program also would meet the District's literacy requirements, allowing officers back into the classroom during the primary morning teaching hours, critical to scheduling the program in all grade levels.

The resulting program, the Elementary School Safety Program (ESSP), began as a pilot in January 2001 at the same 15 schools that tested Life Skills. The pilot ran from January to June 2001. During this pilot, the Department's Juvenile Administration staff met bi-weekly with officer-instructors. The Department tracked and assessed the ease of presenting the material, scheduling, and teacher involvement. After the six-month pilot, the Department surveyed students and teachers. The ESSP coordinator (a Juvenile Administration sergeant) also interviewed officer-instructors. The program received very high marks by students, teachers, and the officer-instructors for content, subject matter, and the literacy-based format. The officer-instructors found the curriculum easy to teach with little prior training. They also found the program manuals complete and easy to use. Based on the participants' positive assessment, the ESSP continued at these 15 schools in the 2001-2002 school year and was expanded to 180 schools in the 2002-2003 school year.

DISCUSSION

ESSP provides instruction in bicycle and pedestrian safety, bullying, drug, tobacco and gang awareness and prevention, firearm safety, and building self-esteem. It also provides instruction in Internet safety, problem solving, media influences, conflict resolution, and juvenile law. These subjects are presented in every classroom, from kindergarten to fifth grade, over a 36-week school year. These subjects are presented in a literacy-based format that satisfies the District's literacy requirements.

The goal of ESSP is to provide comprehensive safety education through a positive police presence in every elementary school within the City of San Diego. The mission of ESSP is:

“The San Diego Police Department in partnership with the San Diego Unified School District is dedicated to promoting safety, health, education, cultural awareness, good character, and leadership skills. It is our mission to help young people improve their lives by building self-esteem, and developing good values and skills during critical years of growth.”

The ESSP curriculum is summarized below:

K thru 3rd: Three core lessons: medication safety, pedestrian safety, and a story by “Officer Bill.” In a story that is read aloud, a young student is confronted with a variety of issues, including pedestrian safety, stranger danger, and conflicts. With the help of “Officer Bill,” the student successfully meets these challenges. After the presentation, the officer-instructor challenges each student to learn his or her home address and phone number. The officer-instructor concludes the story with a visit to a patrol car.

4th Grade: Three core lessons: wheel safety for bicycles, skateboards, scooters, and roller blades; pedestrian safety; and preventing alcohol and tobacco use.

5th Grade: Five core lessons: conflict resolution, gang awareness, juvenile law, drug awareness, treating people fairly to prevent bullying, which is associated with school violence.

In addition to the five cores, there are three elective lessons. These elective lessons are selected based on the needs of the school, students, and the surrounding community. Additionally, ESSP gives officer-instructors the flexibility to arrange topics in the order that best fits the needs of the school and the surrounding community. It also allows the officer to replace one topic with another to address a current event, such as a school gun incident.

Assemblies: Each elementary school that allows its students to ride bicycles to school qualifies for a bicycle safety rodeo; “Kids and Skids,” an interactive program demonstrating traffic safety for pedestrians; and a bike assembly in partnership with the American Automobile Association.

The pilot demonstrated that ESSP provides meaningful, current, and valuable safety information to elementary school-aged children. Unlike the regimented, inflexible D.A.R.E. curriculum that was taught over 17 weeks to only fifth grade students, ESSP taught *all* elementary school students several key safety topics, *in addition to drug, alcohol, tobacco, and violence prevention*, throughout the school year. Also, ESSP was successfully implemented at the pilot schools using existing Juvenile Service Team staffing and resources. ESSP resulted in more service and better quality safety instruction, providing a positive law enforcement presence and the opportunity to develop cooperative relationships with all elementary grades and many more teachers, school administrators, and community members than was possible with D.A.R.E.

The Department is continuing to measure ESSP’s effectiveness, using surveys and statistics. The Department also is collecting data from the County Emergency Management System and its Crime Analysis Unit on pedestrian and wheeled related accidents among school-aged children. The Department also will track gun related incidents, Internet related incidents, and child poisonings. Some of these measures are still in development. However, the Department already has seen impressive reductions in traffic related injuries among six- to eleven-year old children in area commands teaching ESSP -- Northern, Western, Central, and Southern divisions.

Traffic, Pedestrian and Bicycle related injuries among the target age group (6 to 11 yrs.):				
1998-1999 (Pre-ESSP)	1999-2000 (Life Skills)	2000-2001 (E SSP 15 schools)	2001-2002 (E SSP All Schools)	
Northern Division 22	Northern Division 24	Northern Division 7	Northern Division	3
Western Division 27	Western Division 20	Western Division 9	Western Division	11
Central Division 15	Central Division 8	Central Division 9	Central Division	6
Southern Division 16	Southern Division 19	Southern Division 7	Southern Division	6
Total: 80	Total: 71	Total: 32	Total:	26

* From 1998 to 2002 there has been a 67.5% reduction in Traffic, Pedestrian, and Bicycle related injuries.

Student Surveys (2001 – 2002 school year)

Officer-instructors randomly selected 250 students from all grades in the elementary schools representing the four Service Area Commands to complete an evaluation of ESSP. Juvenile Administration received 187 completed evaluations. Four questions were asked in the survey. The response choices were: “1” for not sure, “2” for do not agree, “3” for agree or “4” for strongly agree. The survey results are captured below:

	Breakdown of Student Responses				
	1	2	3	4	Total
1. The elementary school safety program taught me skills I can use in my everyday life.	6	4	57	120	187
2. The officer presented the concepts and information in a way that was easy to understand.	2	0	71	114	187

3. My teacher was involved in the presentations with the officer.	73	69	33	12	187
4. The lessons were easy to understand and interesting.	6	6	57	118	187

Teacher Surveys (2001-2002 school year)

Officer-instructors randomly selected forty teachers from all grades and all elementary schools representing the four area commands to complete evaluations. Juvenile Administration received 19 completed evaluations. Unlike the student surveys, the teachers were required to respond in a narrative format to specific questions about the curriculum, officer involvement, ease of instruction, and scheduling. The teacher evaluations were very positive in all areas questioned. Some comments from teachers included:

“The program has had a very positive effect on the students. The students respected the officer and knew she was an expert and had first-hand experience with the concepts being taught. Her involvement supported other programs that the teachers present to the students i.e., Life skills and Family life.”

“Students thoroughly enjoyed the course – and looked forward to the weekly meetings. They talked about the topics in a positive way throughout the week.”

“The curriculum caused many worthwhile class discussions after things were discussed during the safety classes.”

“Enlightened some kids on drugs. I would like to see a more “scared straight” approach to drugs and crime. Our kids seemed to be too interested in this stuff.”

“The students are more aware, responsible, more apt to make wise choices.”

“They are eager to hear about life concerning drugs/gangs/etc., from a police officer’s view point and experience. Offer has great rapport with 5th grades and had their complete attention during each lesson.”

“It (ESSP) exposed them to things that we don’t cover in our curriculum. It leads to good discussions and problem solving techniques.”

“Important issues had an open forum, real life issues that are applicable to what they have to deal with.”

“School safety, provided a wonderful opportunity for students to discuss topics that they were concerned about with a professional”

“The kids really related to officer, very positive involvement, worked well”

“I don’t believe they (students) will ever smoke! The children were eager to discuss each lesson. The kids told me role playing was good and they seemed to feel the activities was really beneficial.”

The ESSP emphasis is on anti-drug, alcohol, and tobacco education, as well as youth and gang violence prevention and Internet safety in the fourth and fifth grades. Traffic safety education addressing pedestrian and wheel safety in all the elementary grades has significantly reduced the accident and injury rate of school age children in San Diego. Through ESSP, students learn to apply current, accurate safety and substance abuse prevention lessons to their daily lives.

The Department's goal is to complete implementation of ESSP in the remaining elementary schools in the eight school districts in San Diego in the 2002-2003 school year, replacing D.A.R.E. When completely implemented, ESSP will be taught in more than 200 schools in every Council District.

Respectfully submitted,

David Bejarano
Chief of Police
Police Department

Approved: P. Lamont Ewell
Assistant City Manager