

Perceptions About Gangs and School Violence in San Mateo County  
April, 1993 - April, 1994

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**GANGS/SCHOOL VIOLENCE TASK FORCE**

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Perceptions About Gangs and School Violence in San Mateo County  
April, 1993 - April, 1994

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Preface

The Survey

Summary of Responses

- Areas of General Consensus  
Highlights
- Perceptions Open To Further Discussion  
Highlights
- Perceptions That Require Future  
Investigation  
Highlights

Prevention and Intervention Efforts

- Atherton
- Daly City
- Redwood City

Weapons on School Campuses

- Recommendations

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**PREFACE**

As a result of increasing concern about violence on school campuses and gang-related activity throughout San Mateo County, members of the Criminal Justice Council (CJC) decided in April, 1993, to create a Gangs/School Violence Task Force. The mission of the Task Force was to determine the scope of the problems associated with gangs and school violence, explore their root causes, and develop recommendations for addressing both the causes and the effects youth violence.

Initial discussions attempted to evaluate the scope of the problem and whether commonly held perceptions about gangs provided an accurate picture of the situation. Additionally, there was some question as to whether there actually are "commonly held perceptions". Or, did various groups within the County view the problems and their respective causes differently?

There was general agreement among Task Force members that the topic "Gangs and School Violence" contained several sub-issues, including: gang activity in the community, gang activity on school campuses, non-gang violence on campuses, weapons on campus, and children who carry weapons for protection.

It was agreed that the mission of this body would be to seek the opinions of people who come in contact with young people in and out of the criminal justice system, determine what if any efforts are currently being done to combat gangs and school violence, and develop recommendations for implementation by local criminal justice agencies, community groups, parents, and the media.

Perceptions About Gangs and School Violence in San Mateo County  
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**THE SURVEY**

In an effort to foster a better understanding of gang members and the nature of gangs in San Mateo County, the Task Force with the assistance of the San Mateo County Office of Education, designed and widely distributed a "Gang Survey". The purpose of this survey was to measure the perceptions of those people whose roles place them closest to young people and/or gang members.

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## **SUMMARY OF RESPONSES**

A total of 97 respondents returned completed survey forms. They included: Educators, Criminal Justice Council Members, Judges, Police Chiefs/Gang Officers, and Probation Officers. The following is a summary of their responses. Each perception has been placed in one of three categories according to the level of agreement about that perception. These categories include: Areas of General Consensus, which will show those perceptions about which a preponderance of the respondents tended to agree; Perceptions open To Discussion, those perceptions that are generally agreed upon, but about which there is also some disagreement; and Perceptions That Require Further Investigation, those perceptions that require further analysis before consensus can be reached.

Please remember as you read each of the following, they are opinions, based upon what the respondents have observed and believe to be true, but, they are not necessarily fact and may be open to challenge.

### **Areas of General Consensus**

There was general agreement among respondents that gang activity is on the rise in San Mateo County, in County high schools, and at school related events. While male gang members continue to be the biggest problem, it was noted that female gang members are becoming more active participants in gangs. One cause cited for this increase is a lack of parenting and supervision in the home. Children, not finding the support and nurturing they need, are turning to gangs for that sense of belonging.

Respondents generally believed that efforts to halt youth violence and gang activity should include anti-gang programs beginning in Kindergarten and continuing at least through fifth grade, and that students who bring weapons to school should be prosecuted.

### Highlights

- The majority of gang members are in grades 9-12.
- The primary reasons for individuals joining gangs are: for group identification, finding a sense of belonging/ acceptance that is not found in the home or at school, and peer pressure. These are particularly true as they relate to: Filipino, Hispanic, Caucasian, Pacific Islander, and some Black gangs.
- Involvement in Asian gangs is mostly likely associated with some form of organized crime.
- Female gang members are becoming more active participants in gang activity, as

Perceptions About Gangs and School Violence in San Mateo County  
April, 1993 - April, 1994

**PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION EFFORTS**

It is the belief of Task Force members that there are a number of programs that are being tried and implemented within San Mateo County schools. Some of those efforts are being conducted by city and County police departments, others have been undertaken by the schools themselves.

The following is a compilation of some of those programs.

**Atherton**

- P.D. One officer works within the schools. He/she teaches and is part of intervention efforts. One juvenile officer is assigned to investigation.
- Schools Atherton is part of Menlo Park Elementary School District which includes Los Lomas and Redwood City school districts, Sequoia Union High School, private schools and one College. Gang prevention programs include conflict resolution in all elementary schools and peer counseling plus conflict resolution in middle schools. A district wide task force targets at risk students to offer extra support.

**Belmont**

- P.D. Operates a D.A.R.E. Program in fifth grade; nine classes, reaching 275 students. Operates an Anti-Graffiti Program in conjunction with Carlmont High school. Participates in "Career Day" at local schools.
- Schools Conflict resolution and "advisement classes" in all schools. Special programs for at-risk youth.

**Brisbane**

- P.D. Operates a D.A.R.E. program in Brisbane's two schools.
- Schools QUEST-program. Brisbane schools operate regular counseling sessions. They are in the process of developing a peer counseling program. There are school "rules", for example, students cannot wear gang clothing etc.

**Broadmoor**

Perceptions About Gangs and School Violence in San Mateo County  
April, 1993 - April, 1994

**WEAPONS ON SCHOOL CAMPUSES**

In an effort to determine whether weapons on San Mateo County school campuses are a significant problem, the Task Force conducted an informal survey of school districts, questioning them about the number of weapons confiscated on campus and how those incidents were handled. After reviewing this information, it was determined that the validity of the reporting procedures could not be substantiated, causing Task Force Members to be concerned that the information provided may not be complete.

The survey did indicate, however, that there may be some confusion among school administrators regarding what is legally required when a weapon is discovered on campus. Some districts indicated that in some cases, school personnel preferred to handle the situation in-house rather than contacting law enforcement officials as is required by California law.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

After a year of investigation and study into the issues of gangs and school violence, it is the conclusion of Task Force Members that while gangs, youth violence, and weapons among young people are problems in San Mateo County, they are at the present time, manageable. However, it is also the belief of the Members that these problems must be addressed now before they become completely out of hand.

During the course of the year, much of the conversation revolved around the belief that all too frequently, problems among young people are left up to school personnel. Too often, our schools are sent children who are inadequately cared for and disciplined. Task Force Members agreed that these are not merely "education" or "school" problems, but rather are the entire community's problems. Therefore, it is up to the entire community to respond. It was further agreed that the financial burden for dealing with young people who are involved in criminal or problem behavior falls far too frequently on the schools. Criminal justice system dollars need to be designated for what are essentially criminal justice problems. Educating our children, not crime fighting, should be the primary responsibility of teachers.

Recommendation One:

Youth violence is a community problem. Schools and law enforcement alone cannot be expected to parent our children. Parents, church and community groups, and extended families must assume their responsibilities for raising children. It should be the responsibility of every person to reach out to children whenever and wherever there is a need -- and even if there isn't one.

#### Recommendation Two:

Gangs often represent family, support, and/or a sense of identity for children who are not receiving those essential needs at home. It is the responsibility of parents to provide familial support, identification, and nurturing to their children. It should also be the responsibility of the extended family and the community at large to assist parents in developing parenting skills and in providing children with whatever they need to grow into mentally and physically healthy, productive, and contributing members of society.

#### Recommendation Three:

As we have seen with anti-smoking campaigns, education works, especially with children. Anti-gang programs are vitally important in preventing young people from entering or continuing in gangs. These programs should be continued and enhanced.

#### Recommendation Four:

It is strongly recommended that each school district, working with their local police department, develop a comprehensive policy or protocol for handling weapons and violence on school campuses. These protocols should strictly comply with State law.

#### Recommendation Five:

Children who are involved in violent or criminal activity or who are caught with a weapon on campus are in some cases suspended or expelled. While it may be desirable to take these children out of the school setting, reducing their influence on and danger to other students and teachers, merely removing them from school in some cases may exacerbate the problem. Policies and solutions should be developed to ensure that children who are suspended and expelled are having their educational needs met, that they are not simply out causing problems in the community rather than on campus.

#### Recommendation Six:

The issues of gangs and school violence are too broad and include too many needs and sub-issues to be addressed in the context of one task force. Therefore, it is recommended that task forces, relative to the overall issue of youth violence, be created to focus on root causes of violence among young people.

Recommendation Seven:

The majority of young people are good kids who make an effort to stay out of trouble. Children who are involved in gangs and school violence are actually in the minority and may be involved in these activities as a means of getting attention. It is, therefore, recommended that the community, schools, and especially the media highlight and report on positive youth activities, giving as much or more attention to positive as well as negative endeavors.

P.D. Operates a Say no to Gangs Program in Broadmoor's three schools.  
Once a year police officers bowl with students on Cops and Kids Day.  
Officers lecture in Broadmoor schools during Red Ribbon Week.  
In the process of starting a new D.A.R.E. Program.

### **Burlingame**

P.D. Officer works full-time teaching GREAT in elementary and middle schools.  
Schools Peer counseling and conflict resolution in all schools.

**Colma** - There are no schools in Colma.

### **Daly City**

P.D. Operates a Say no to Gangs Program for eight weeks, 1 hr per week, in all fifth grades.  
Operates a 7th grade Follow up Gang Program for two days each year, reaching 800 students. Expansion to 9th grade is in progress.  
Anti-graffiti programs are presented to all grade levels.  
Anti-drug presentations upon request.  
High schools are presented with personal safety programs and anti drug and alcohol presentations.  
KARES is an after-school program for at risk youth.

Schools Operates FUTURES in the Daly City schools, including peer tutoring and volunteer peer models. This is a pilot project done in conjunction with the County Health Department, Human Services Agency, and Mental Health Department which could be transferable to other communities.

### **E. Palo Alto**

P.D. In the process of starting a D.A.R.E. Program.  
Schools No gang prevention programs.

### **Foster City**

P.D. Students participate in informational program, "Student in Government Day".

Youth Services Officer provides a Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Program for 4th and 7th grade students.  
Youth Services Officer participates in school activities, makes class presentations, and meets weekly with school officials.  
Anti-drug presentations upon request.

Schools Conflict resolution and peer counseling in all schools.

### **Half Moon Bay**

P.D. Conducts weekly meetings with school counselors to address police and school issues as they arise.  
Distributes educational materials regarding crime, drug, and gang prevention.  
In the process of developing a program similar to D.A.R.E.

Schools All schools have conflict resolution programs. Some schools operate after school programs. In the high schools ex-gang members, school officials, parents and students meet every Monday in an effort to prevent gang activity. Additionally, there are regular meetings with the school principal, parents, students and the local catholic priest.

### **Hillsborough**

P.D. "Student Government Day". The leadership class at the local intermediate school receives talks from elected and staff officials during the year and in May, the students observe different positions for half a day.  
Presents a Street Smart Kid Program each year to fifth grades.  
Police officers have lunch hour talks on topics of current interest.  
Officers have lunch once a week at the school.

Schools The middle schools have peer counseling and conflict resolution programs.  
Elementary schools operate peer counseling programs.

### **Menlo Park**

P.D. Provides a counseling program, using counseling interns for students ages 5-17.  
Participates in Adopt-A-School. The school adopted is Willow Oaks School.  
Recently assigned three new Community Police officers to Menlo Park schools as a small portion of their duties.

Schools Conflict resolution in elementary schools and conflict resolution plus peer counseling in middle schools. Additionally, the elementary schools operate the QUEST program. There is a district wide task force that work with at risk students.

## **Millbrae**

- P.D. Provides the McGruff Crime Prevention Program with emphasis on pre-school children.  
Provides presentations to Mills High School students.  
Operates a D.A.R.E. Program.  
Presents gang awareness and prevention classes during Diversity, Understanding, Awareness and Culture Day.  
Will provide a Friday Night Basketball and Saturday Graffiti Clean Up Program with Mills and Capuchino High Schools in cooperation with the Parks Department.  
An Explorer Program is provided with Boy Scouts.
- Schools Conflict resolution programs in all elementary schools and peer counseling in all middle schools.

## **Pacifica**

- P.D. Elementary School children are provided with Drug and Alcohol Abuse Education.  
Police Officers spend time regularly at each high school campus to allow informal discussions and non-conflict meetings with the students.  
A juvenile officer provides both informal and formal counseling.  
A Diversion Program is provided through the juvenile officer.  
A Ride Along Program is available to all persons over 14 years of age.  
An Explorer Program is provided with Boy Scouts.  
Operates a School Safety Program.  
A Parent Awareness Program assists parents of problem juveniles.  
Presentations upon request.
- Schools Conflict resolution programs in all schools, reaching 4000 students.

## **Redwood City**

- P.D. Operates a Deciding Against Gangs Program which works with students, school staff, and parents to steer students away from gang involvement. Provides a Community Resource Book.
- Schools In addition to Deciding Against Gangs, provides guest speakers for middle school students.  
Provides parent education workshops.

## **San Bruno**

- P.D. Operates an Explorer Program through Boy Scouts in all fifth grades. A D.A.R.E. Program will start September, 1994.
- Schools All elementary schools operate conflict resolution programs. Conflict resolution and peer counseling programs in junior high schools.

## **San Carlos**

- P.D. Operates a D.A.R.E. Program in fifth and sixth grades with secondary work in K-5 grades.
- Schools Operate peer counseling and conflict resolution as gang prevention classes.

## **San Mateo**

- P.D. Provides "Here's Looking at You, 2000" involving drug education and refusal skills in elementary schools.
- Operates a Conflict Resolution Program in one school. In the process of starting a program with emphasis on at-risk students.
- Specific officers are assigned as a liaison to schools within their beats.
- A School Safety Council which includes representatives of the school board, school administration, a member of the City Council and representatives of city departments meet to resolve school/student safety issues.
- Schools Peer counseling programs in all schools. Some schools have conflict resolution programs. The Aragon school has an after school program in conjunction with the YMCA.

## **So. San Francisco**

- P.D. Operates a DARE Program in fifth grades.

Participates in Adopt-A-School program - officers adopt a school and stop by a few times a week to interact.

Provides a School Liaison Program involving two officers who are assigned to the schools to interact with the students K-12 and gather gang intelligence.

Gang classes by S.L.O.s to all 6, 7, 8<sup>th</sup> grades for intervention purposes. (Individual classes, one hour each, include videos, discussion, etc., and are held once a year during fall semester.)

Gang presentations upon request.

Individual meetings with gang members and their parents by a staff person.

Letters sent to the parents when individuals are involved in any type of gang activities.

Police, probation and school administrators meet each month on the school site to talk to gang members who are on probation. It is a comparing of notes that tells the individual that everyone is watching.

At Risk Youth Committee comprised of administrators from middle and high schools, Recreation Department, School Board Members, Boys and Girls Club and NPFA, share information and make program recommendations.

Provides Boys and Girls Club Midnight Basketball.

Working with the Recreation department to move programs from the parks to the middle schools in order to have after school sports programs on the school site. At risk youth are encouraged to attend.

Collaboration on grants with the school district to provide programs for at risk youth.

Special patrols in the gang areas. Walking assignment to build relationships with the youth and adults. Zero tolerance approach for all gang members.

Designated gang officer chosen on each of the patrol teams who are responsible for knowing the members and activities of the gang.

Assigning cellular phones to the gang officers and contacting the parents on any negative encounter with the gang members

Graffiti paint out ordinance which allows the City to paint out graffiti on private property within three days after it is reported.

Working with schools to institute a dress code K-12.

S.L.O.s attend/host monthly county Gang Action Team meetings for county-wide trends and updates.

Gang awareness classes for new police recruits and reserve officers.

Schools There are conflict resolution programs in all schools and grade levels. The high schools operate peer counseling programs.

### **Sheriff's Dept.**

Provides a D.A.R.E. Program in the 5th and 6th grades throughout the school year. This unit is comprised of four Deputy Sheriffs who are D.A.R.E instructors in addition to their regular duties.

Provides a School Liaison Program involving two Deputies who are assigned to the schools to assist staff and students in grades K-12. This unit provides student counseling, training for school staff, assists in teaching government and citizenship classes and provides crisis interdiction on campus.

Provides a Juvenile Diversion Program to assist minor offenders and their families and divert eligible offenders away from the juvenile justice system. This unit is comprised of one Detective Sergeant assisted by the Court Officer, Community Policing Deputies and Gang Prevention Detectives.

Provides a Gang Prevention Program for juveniles of all ages. This unit is staffed by two detectives whose function in the schools is to educate students about the dangers of gang membership, monitor gang activities county wide and provide interdiction in gang activities.

### **Woodside/Portola Valley**

Schools The Portola Valley School District has conflict resolution classes in all grade levels.

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### School District Programs

Many of the School Districts in San Mateo County operate a variety of programs designed to address gang issues. These are described under four headings:

#### **1. Curriculum Programs**

Districts use many curriculum programs to educate students about gangs and to teach them skills which they can use to avoid becoming involved in a gang. These programs include:

- social studies units on social responsibility
- fifth grade gang program
- Drug, Alcohol, Tobacco Educate (DATE)
- the Youth Empowerment Program

- Quest Program
- conflict resolution training
- decision-making skills classes
- ninth grade health units
- home room advisory sessions
- DARE program

## **2. Extra-Curricular Programs**

Extra curricular activities provide students with positive alternatives to gang involvement. These include:

- school sports
- school clubs
- Recreation Department programs
- after school tutoring
- dances/social events

## **3. Training Programs**

Schools address gang issues through training programs for staff and parents. Examples include:

- Youth Empowerment parent training
- Parent Advisory Council meetings (e.g., Chapter 1 and Migrant Education Programs)
- CORE Team training
- Healthy Kids/Healthy California workshops
- Safe Schools workshops
- Gang Awareness training for staff
- Parent-teen communication training
- Crisis planning

## **4. Collaboration with other Agencies**

School districts collaborate with several agencies to combat gang problems:

- Multi-Agency Team
- Police Departments
- Sheriff's Department
- Health Department drug and alcohol programs
- FUTURES project
- Recreation Departments (e.g., sports programs)
- Probation Department
- Pyramid Alternative
- Youth Service Bureau
- Community Living Room

\* For detailed information about any of the above programs, please contact the individual police agency or school.



- opposed to being companions and observers.
- High schools are experiencing more gang violence, especially at school dismissal times and at sports and social functions.
  - Anti-gang programs with an emphasis on prevention should be implemented in grades K-5.
  - Parents are not accepting their responsibilities relative to preventing their children from participating in gang activity.
  - Students who are found with weapons on school grounds should be prosecuted.
  - Gangs from outside San Mateo County cause problems within the County.

### **Perceptions Open To Further Discussion**

Respondents were mixed in their opinions about where the majority of gang activity occurs, many believing that it centers in larger cities, while others were unsure if this is the case. There also appeared to be differences of opinion regarding whether gangs tended to be territorial, focusing on a particular neighborhood or city.

### Highlights

- **The majority of gang problems occur in the larger cities.** All of the respondents tended to agree with this perception, but few strongly supported it. Only the Criminal Justice Council Members seemed to see this as very true.
- **Gangs identify with a particular neighborhood/territory, rather than spreading across a wide area.** Most of the respondents agreed with this perception. The strongest agreement came from the South and North County Educators, and Criminal Justice Council Members. The least agreement came from Probation Officers. Among them, 40% disagreed with this perception.
- **San Mateo County Police/ Probation authorities adequately report the severity of gang problems.** The respondents were generally divided on this perception. Most supported it, if only marginally. It got the greatest support from South and Central County Educators and the lowest support from Criminal Justice Council Members and Police Chiefs/Gang Officers.

### **Perceptions That Require Future Investigation**

There was general agreement that students who bring weapons to school should be expelled, however, that perception has been placed in this category due to the fact that the survey did not address the issue of what the student would do in lieu of school, how his/her educational needs would be met, and whether this solved the problem or merely displaced it. Additionally, should a child who brings a weapon to school for protection, because he/she has been threatened or is afraid, be treated the same as one who brings one for criminal purposes? These issues were not explored in the context of the survey.

## Highlights

- **Students who bring weapons to school should be expelled, and expelled students should be required to join a program which includes literacy training.** Both of these were generally supported among the respondents, but this perception was seen as needing more discussion. Other options and other factors should be considered before definitively categorizing this perception.
- **Community organizations are accepting their responsibility relative to preventing gang activities.** None of the respondents strongly agreed with this perception. The majority disagreed, with the Central County Educators leading the group with 73% responding in the negative.
- **School authorities in San Mateo County adequately report the severity of gang problems.** Most of the responses about this perception were sharply divided between those who agree, 67% of Judges, and those who disagree, 71% of Police Chiefs/Gang Officers. The remaining groups were more evenly divided in their opinions.